

Moses's Yes to God
Deut 31:7-8

May 16, 2021 HWD

⁷Then Moses summoned Joshua
and said to him in the sight of all Israel:
“Be strong and bold,
for you are the one
who will go with this people into the land
that the Lord has sworn to their ancestors to give them;
and you will put them in possession of it.
⁸It is the Lord who goes before you.
He will be with you;
he will not fail you or forsake you.
Do not fear or be dismayed.”

Deut 34:1-12

Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo,
to the top of Pisgah,
which is opposite Jericho,
and the Lord showed him the whole land:
Gilead as far as Dan, ²all Naphtali,
the land of Ephraim and Manasseh,
all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea,
³the Negeb, and the Plain—
that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—
as far as Zoar.
⁴The Lord said to him,
“This is the land of which I swore to Abraham,
to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying,
‘I will give it to your descendants’;
I have let you see it with your eyes,
but you shall not cross over there.”

⁵Then Moses, the servant of the Lord,
died there in the land of Moab,
at the Lord's command.
⁶He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab,
opposite Beth-peor,
but no one knows his burial place to this day.
⁷Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died;

his sight was unimpaired
and his vigor had not abated.

⁸The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days;
then the period of mourning for Moses was ended.

⁹Joshua son of Nun
was full of the spirit of wisdom,
because Moses had laid his hands on him;
and the Israelites obeyed him,
doing as the Lord had commanded Moses.

¹⁰Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel
like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.

¹¹He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders
that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt,
against Pharaoh and all his servants
and his entire land,

¹²and for all the mighty deeds
and all the terrifying displays of power
that Moses performed
in the sight of all Israel.

Does the death of Moses preach? Looking at Deut. 34:1-12, Israel is on the cusp of transition, a big one. To honor our upcoming graduates, we'll talk about the death of Israel's greatest prophet and how transitions can lead us exactly where we need to be.

The curse of being a preacher, a professional who speaks publicly—meaning in front of you all, week after week, and who has to try and write something compelling, inspiring, challenging and comforting, week in and week out—well the curse of being a preacher is sitting in graduation ceremonies and critique someone else's speech.

I totally understand that there is a difference between a graduation speech and a sermon; they serve two different functions—they are given in two different settings—they are attended by two different—well you get the idea. So, this morning I hope to combine these two things, a sermon and a graduation speech into one thing and to do it in a timely manner.

And though you all are not preachers, at least not this week, I will look for your critique this coming week.

Moses lived to be 120 years old.

That's a long time.

Most of you heard last week
that Tripp's grandad, Claude's father,
died at the age of 101.

Claude Sr. could still say the blessing before a meal
and tell you joke up until the end.

The oldest known person alive
is a woman living in Japan,
Kane Tanaka who is 118.



She is catching up to Moses.

Tanaka is the only mother alive
of a WWII veteran.

The oldest person in the US
just died the past April,
Hester McCardell Ford of Charlotte, NC.



She was 115 or 116—
her family discovered census records
indicating that she might have been born
a year before they had previously thought.

Ford had 12 children (four of whom are still living),
68 grandchildren,
125 great-grandchildren

and at least 120 great-great-grandchildren.¹

Wow.

Moses lived to be 120 years old.



If you are graduating from high school
and are around 18,
that's at least 100 more years of life
you have to look forward to.
Can you even imagine that?
Living to the year 2121.
Deuteronomy tells us
that Moses's eyesight was unimpaired when he died
and that his vigor was unabated.

Meaning when God told him
to look out over the Promised land,
Moses climbed that mountain himself
and could see the vastness
of the land of milk and honey.

Even so, he knew it was time;
it was someone else's turn
to go ahead and take the next steps.
And so old Moses,
old Moses with good eyesight
and keen enthusiasm,
trudges up the plains of Moab
to Mount Nebo to the top of Pisgah
and the Lord shows him the promised land
that he will not enter.

¹ <https://www.npr.org/2021/04/24/990505023/hester-ford-oldest-living-american-dies-at-115-or-116>



I want you to think about that scene for a moment.

What we know about Moses
is that he has had a pretty full
and complicated life.

In fact, everything in his life—
from being pulled from the Nile at birth,
to his calling to be the leader of the Hebrews,
to leading them through the desert
so, they might know God—
everything was leading up to this very moment.

He's standing at the top of Mt. Pisgah
and being shown the promised land
and he's told your time has come.
He will die and another generation
of God's people will go forward.

Moses does fuss at God.

He doesn't throw a tantrum
about all that he has endured for *this* God
and with *this* people.

He doesn't try to cheat death
and run down the mountain
so, at least he can set a toe
in Canaan.

He doesn't sulk that this isn't fair
given all he's done.

In fact, what we are given privy to see,
in the scripture,
is an intimate moment
between God and Moses.

Where what God has promised
all the way from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,
Moses at least is granted vision to take in,

and he seems content enough with that.
What a witness.

Given all that Moses' life has entailed,
his concession to God's will and plan
are an amazing model of a life of faith.
This acceptance reminded me
of something I heard the other day on a podcast

—"Imagine if 'thy will be done'—[in] the Lord's Prayer—
wasn't just [a yes] to the good stuff,
more money, more friends,
but 'thy will be done'
meant whatever is happening, 'yes.'
It's just a radical 'yes.'
Imagine a Christianity where,
'thy will be done'
is a moment-by-moment surrender?
to the giver of life and death."²

Even though Moses doesn't live long enough
to hear Jesus say, 'thy will be done,'
Moses lives a radical yes, to God.
Imagine if we lived that way.
Where whatever came our way,
whatever was happening,
yes God, thy will be done.
Moses had 120 years to work that out.
There are days that I feel like
I have so much to learn
about saying yes to God
and I've only been around for 40 years.

Speaking specifically to our upcoming graduates,
it can be hard to say yes to God.
You likely know that.
And if you don't know it yet,
you'll find that as you continue to mature,

² <https://theliturgists.com/podcast>

living a life of faith is no easy or small task.
What you are about to embark on,
the next 4 years of your life is so exciting.
But it will also be hard.

It is new,
you've never done something like this before—
you aren't Moses,
ending your journey,
you are more like Joshua—
gathered with a lot of people
about to do something new.
You are the ones looking into the promised land
and my goodness,
there is so much good to come.
So much.

And so, I want to say we
are so proud of you.
So very proud of you.
We are proud of all our graduates,
college and high school;
this year and last.



Because your lives have been turned upside down
in ways that our lives
at your age were not.
And even though you are young in years,
you have something in common
with Israel's greatest prophet.

You all know what it is like
to have to change course and direction
just to get something done.

You all know what it is to work hard.
You know what it is like to wait for something,
the thing you have been
working towards for what feels like forever:

like your senior year of high school
—to enjoy that one free period
where you don't have to be in the building.
You know what it is like
to want to have a normal senior night
on the soccer field.

You know what it is like
to work hard for something
that is so close you can see it.
And you know what it is
to be disappointed.

But you have trudged on.
You have shown resilience and persistence.
And so yes,
we are so proud of you.
Really proud of you.

But this is moment of transition.
And just like our text,
something big is ahead.
I hope you will say a radical yes,
to what the Lord has in store for you.
And know that when you do answer yes,
you will be presented with the constant opportunity
to grow in your relationship with God.

But as you stand on this precipice,
you cannot know,
none of us can,
what lies ahead.

But we can give you a glance
at what lies behind.
Behind you, supporting you

are the Moses-es of your baptismal life.
Your Parents and teachers,
coaches and Sunday school leaders,
the youth advisors and the moms
who let you play video games
in their basements and eat all the food.
Behind you are the grandparents
who came to your piano recitals
and the dads who let you
pick out your own clothes for school on picture day
...these people are like Moses.
They are the ones who have been with you,
guiding, leading, helping, growing you
into the people you are stepping out to be.

In fact, it is the task
of every single person of faith,
to be a Moses
—one who prepares others
for a world to inherit.

The family of faith
makes this promise
whenever we baptize a child or baby.

The family of faith
promises to nurture, care and teach
this baptized child
the faith we have inherited.

It is a radical, yes to God,
to be baptized into a family of faith
—a blind and hopeful promise,
That God will do more
than we can ever imagine
in a person's life.

Our formation as God's people
is important enough
that we will make promises out loud
in front of each other,
to be a Moses; to be guides, leaders, caregivers.

We are a people
who will believe in each other
and in each other's children
even when we know
that we don't get to see all of them
grow up and out.
As people of this household of faith,
you will never, not carry a piece of us with you
wherever you go.

Moses stands at the top of the mountain
ready to let someone else take over,
take up what he had started.
This moment is the transitional moment
that brings Israel to the fulfillment
of becoming a nation.
Everyone here knows about transition.
And as Moses dies and is buried
on the wrong side of the Jordan,
the text tells us something
about this prophet.

There is a final word
about Moses:
the final words of Torah,
the first five books of scripture,
attributed to Moses
—they end with these words,
“¹⁰Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel
like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.
¹¹He was unequaled...”



Moses the man

will not go with the people
into the land of Canaan.

But Moses the memory will.

Moses is the greatest prophet
in Israel's history.

He may accomplish more after his death
as a living memory for Israel
than he does during his life.

Moses as a living memory
is the constant reminder to say yes to God
—thy will be done.

“Though he appears to be excluded,
he is the key
to ‘the people’s’ memory of God’s mighty acts of deliverance,
and therefore, of their ongoing
covenantal relationship.

In memory, then,
Moses remains the glue
keeping Israel and God together.”

We are staying here
and aren't going where you are going.

Like Moses our job has been
to prepare the way
for your relationship with God to grow.

All of us, who stay, will continue
to work hard to prepare a land
that we hope is a little less broken,
a little less harsh,
a little more verdant and bountiful
than the one we leave behind.

We will not all
get to see the fruits of all our labor
—yet we are sending you on,
on ahead while we stay here—
we are sending you
to begin your something new.

Moses was 120 years old.
Some of us still have
plenty of life ahead of us.
And some of us are past middle age
and are looking at less years in front of us.
But what the witness Moses gives all of us,
is that willingness to say a radical yes
to whatever God's plan is.
A moment-by-moment surrender
to the giver of life and death.
Of course, we all know by now
that Christ is the ultimate example of this.
Christ is, after all, the one who teaches us
to say to God, thy will be done.

And Christ stands on the mountain,
just like Moses and says,
the promised land here,
everywhere around us.
Because the opportunity
to grow in your relationship with God is
possible through my living presence, the Spirit.
That's why Matthew's Gospel
describes Jesus as the new Moses.

Hope is trusting
what you have no control over,
but believing that it can and will
be good for the flourishing
of creation and creatures.

It is our hope that what you have learned
while you have been with us—
that the memory of it
will serve you for what is to come.
Our hope is that you will have encountered
God through this large
and wonderfully diverse family
and that somehow,

having gotten as close as you can up to this point—
standing on top of your Pisgah

to look at the vast opportunity that awaits you,
we hope that with your sight unimpaired
and your vigor unabated,
will step into the witness of Moses,
and be prepared to be a Joshua
saying as the Lord taught us,
thy will be done.