

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

May 16, 2021 HWD

<sup>7</sup>Then 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.  
<sup>8</sup>It 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, <sup>2</sup>all Naphtali,  
the land of Ephraim and Manasseh,  
all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea,  
<sup>3</sup>the Negeb, and the Plain—  
that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—  
as far as Zoar.  
<sup>4</sup>The 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.”

<sup>5</sup>Then Moses, the servant of the Lord,  
died there in the land of Moab,  
at the Lord's command.

<sup>6</sup>He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab,  
opposite Beth-peor,  
but no one knows his burial place to this day.

<sup>7</sup>Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died;

his sight was unimpaired  
and his vigor had not abated.

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

<sup>9</sup>Joshua 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.

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

<sup>11</sup>He was unequaled 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,

<sup>12</sup>and 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.

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<sup>1</sup> <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."<sup>2</sup>

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,

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<sup>2</sup> <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.

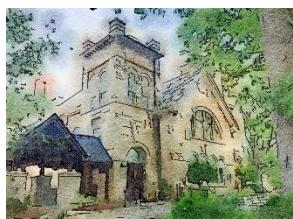
Moses stands at the top of the mountain  
ready to let someone else take over,  
take up what he had started.

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,  
“<sup>10</sup>Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel  
like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.  
<sup>11</sup>He 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.