

## “Taking in the View”

Liturgical Date: The Transfiguration of Our Lord (C)

Primary Text: Deuteronomy 24:1-12 (whole chapter), also brings in St. Luke 9:28-36

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the Transfiguration of Our Lord, is the Old Testament Lesson which is the thirty-fourth and final chapter of Deuteronomy. This Sunday of the Transfiguration is always the “grand finale” to the season of Epiphany. With Easter being later this year, it has been a blessing to spend some time in a longer Epiphany season. We have heard of how Jesus was revealing Himself to be the long-promised Messiah, the Holy Son of God. We have heard of the coming of the Wise Men, the Baptism of Jesus by John, the wedding at Cana, and numerous miracles and teachings that all point to this truth. And when we read of the glorious Transfiguration it is crystal clear as to whom Jesus of Nazareth is. The other-worldly white that shines from Him, the appearance of Moses and Elijah, and the capping off of this by the Father speaking the same thing He did at Jesus’ Baptism, *“This is my beloved Son; hear him.”* To Peter, James, and John that day, and to us today, how could this be any clearer? The title of the sermon is “Taking in the View” as we see some incredible views taken in on both the Mount of Transfiguration and for Moses upon Mount Nebo.

Perhaps you can think of one beautiful view that you have been blessed to see in your life. Maybe you have been to the Grand Canyon, witnessed the New York City skyline lit up at night, or gazed down from

a mountain top at the incredible work of God's hand. As you took in that view, you may have wanted it to last forever. You may be thinking of a particularly memory right now, or it could be hard for you to just pick one of the things that you have seen as the "best view ever." I have been blessed throughout my life to have been able to see some incredible and beautiful scenes. I don't think I could just pick one. But I am partial to those elevated views where you can see for miles the wonders below. I included one of my favorites on the bulletin cover, a photo I snapped at Meteora in Greece (went there with Raegan in the summer of 2018)- which literally means "suspended in the air". There were incredible and unique rock formations, monasteries built by monks without any power equipment that just sat perched atop the rocks, and a stunning view of the Thessaly plain below. And when you "took in the view" wherever your favorite observation point was it is even sweeter if it was something you wanted to see for a long time and finally got there. I looked forward to seeing Meteora for about a year and when I got there, I was so excited the night before the tour it was hard to sleep.

In today's Old Testament reading we see Moses taking in a view of somewhere that he had waited a long time to see. Not just a year, but for decades: as he had led the people of Israel in the wilderness for 40 years prior to this point. This land was promised long before Moses: to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This was not just a tourist "wow" spot to see and leave, but to be a homeland for the chosen people of God. The Hebrews were made slaves in Egypt, but they had the promise of the land of Canaan-the literal Promised Land. God worked to free them and

now they were on the cusp of finally entering it. Moses and the people of Israel had waited a long time, and here it is!

So a 120 year old Moses scaled the 2,643 feet of Mount Nebo, Pisgah which is in the Abarim mountain range. Verse 2 tells that the Lord showed Moses the expanse of this territory with its borders. Moses is taking it in. He is finally here. The Great "I AM" that had called him from the burning bush and continued to speak has led His people to their destination. This is it!

But there is one problem. Verses 4-5, *"And the Lord said to him, 'This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, I will give it to your offspring. I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go there.' So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord."* Huh? After all that he had done in service to the Lord, Moses would not get to enter in? Verse 6 tells us that Moses then died and was buried-most likely by the angels of God Himself-in a location that is unknown (this is an interesting side excursion, but we won't go there today). In chapter 32:48-52 God had already declared this and said that Moses would die on Mt. Nebo.

But why? It wasn't because Moses was old and weak and his body was giving out. Verse 7 tells us that he still had good eyesight and plenty of vigor-he had just proved spry enough to climb a tall mountain after all! It wasn't because Moses didn't have an impressive enough of a resume. Moses is the most towering figure in the history of Old Testament Israel. So loved that the author of Hebrews has to tell people that he is not greater than Jesus. Verse 8 tells us that the people of Israel wept for 30 days after Moses died and verses 10-12 give an

impressive “eulogy” to his mighty deeds. Moses is the author of the first 5 books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, or the Torah. This is about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the Old Testament and almost as long as the whole New Testament. Moses led over 2 million people out of slavery in Egypt. Incredible miracles like the parting of the Red Sea and manna from heaven occurred. He kept an often ungrateful and disobedient people going for 40 years in the wilderness. He had a communion, a communication with God, that included delivering the 10 Commandments and the Law. This system of law would impact the world for thousands of years.

So what’s the problem? Sin. Of course Moses was a sinner. We all are. Moses had killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew slave, causing him to flee to Midian. But this is not the specific sin that keeps him from entering the promised land of Canaan. Numbers Chapter 20 tells us what it was. The Hebrew people needed water in the desert. God directed Moses that he will provide water from a rock. Moses is very specifically told to speak to the rock and it will bring forth water. But instead, Moses strikes the rock twice with his staff. In this, Moses had failed to listen to God and is kept from entering Canaan.

That’s it? “This doesn’t sound too bad,” we are tempted to think. Not being able to enter the Promised Land after all he had done because he struck a rock with a staff instead of speaking to it seems like a harsh judgment. But this is how much of the world thinks-and we can be tempted to think, is it not? “My sins aren’t really that bad. I don’t do the bad things I did in my youth anymore. I have done a lot of other good things to outweigh my bad.” But let me ask you this? How many sins does it take to keep someone from entering heaven? One. Just one sin

makes us a lawbreaking sinner. To enter the Promised Land of heaven we must be free from *all* sin, we must have as much righteousness as God. We are not judged by the standards of a sinful world, but by a holy God-and His standard is perfect holiness. And of course Moses, like all others, committed many more sins than one.

So Moses is allowed, by God's mercy, to take in the view of the long-awaited Promised Land, but not to enter it due to his sin. In more recent times, a parallel has been drawn between Moses and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. On April 3, 1968 Martin Luther King gave his final speech, in support of striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee. He closes that speech with these words:

We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live - a long life; longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

On April 4, just a few hours after speaking these words, Martin Luther King was dead, gunned down by an assassin's bullet at the Lorraine Motel. It didn't seem fair to many people, but as Dr. King said he knew that he may not get to the promised land of racial equality-but the people that he led would. He is not complaining, nor do we see any complaining from Moses.

Did Moses ever get to the Promised Land? Did he ever set foot in Canaan? Did he ever get to view, with his own eyes, the place that he gazed on from atop Mt. Nebo? Actually, he did. 1400 years later we

read in the Gospels about the Transfiguration. And who is there atop that Mount of Transfiguration with Elijah and Jesus? Moses. We know from the Gospel that Moses did actually get to Canaan. It was a long time coming, but it happened! Why? Did God change His mind and decide to overlook Moses' sin? No. The key as to why Moses is able to enter the Promised Land is whom he is there with. Jesus. When he does finally set foot in the Promised Land, it is with Jesus. And things have not changed today. Our sins separate us from God. They condemn us. They keep us out of the Promised Land. But in Jesus, by grace through faith our sins are forgiven. When we are with Jesus, that is we have saving faith in Him, we are cleansed and made righteous. It is only with and by Jesus that Moses, or anyone else, enters the eternal Promised Land of Heaven.

A story was related from another pastor about a time when he visited an art museum. He was not dressed in his clericals, but regular clothes. There was a painting of the crucifixion that he was standing before and gazing at in reflection when a young boy, who must have wandered away from his parents, walked up and also began staring at the painting too. The pastor asked the boy, "Do you know who that is?" Without hesitation, the boy said, "Sure, that's Jesus, and they're putting him to death. And those guys standing around the bottom of the cross are soldiers. And the lady in the middle who is crying is his mother." Then without so much as a "good-bye" the boy walked off to find his parents. The pastor stood there a few more minutes smiling that this young lad knew so much about Jesus. Just then, the boy came back. He said, "Hey mister, I forgot to tell you the most important part." Pointing

at the painting the boy said, "You see, this isn't the way it ends. Jesus didn't stay dead. He came back to life again, and He's still alive today."

This week, with Ash Wednesday, we begin the season of Lent. In Lent, we reflect deeply on our sins, our rebellion against God. We speak even more about the cross and Jesus' death upon it. The view from Calvary was not a stunningly beautiful nature scene or city skyline. It was a scene of bloody death. Of mocking and laughing at Jesus by many. Of crying and mourning by those who loved Him.

But like that young boy in the museum, don't let your view this Lenten season end at the cross. Because we know that Easter is coming, the resurrection victory of Jesus. Our sins are why Jesus went to the cross. Without the cross, there is no perfect one-time sacrifice for sin. Moses' sin kept him from entering the Promised Land, as he could only view it from afar. But with Jesus, Moses is able to take in the view up close and personal. Without Jesus, our sins also keep us at a distance from God. But with Jesus, we are drawn near and forgiven.

I asked you to think of the most, or one of the most, beautiful views you have ever seen. You may have wanted to stay there forever. Peter, James, and John had to come down from the mountaintop as there was still much to be done. But with the cross and empty tomb, it has been done. As we sang in our processional hymn, "*We pray Thee, bring us by Thy grace To see Thy glory face to face.*" With Jesus we take in the view, we live in the view, and the glorious fellowship with God and His people never ends.

Amen.