

Why Can't I Go, Too?

P-24A

Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Matthew 22:34-46

October 26, 2008

^{NRS} **Matthew 22:34** When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵ and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" ³⁷ He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." ⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: ⁴² "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." ⁴³ He said to them, "How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, ⁴⁴ 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet" ' ? ⁴⁵ If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" ⁴⁶ No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

^{NRS} **Deuteronomy 34:1** 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, ² all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, ³ the Negeb, and the Plain-- that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees-- as far as Zoar. ⁴ 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." ⁵ Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, at the LORD's command. ⁶ He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. ⁷ Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigor had not abated. ⁸ The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. ¹¹ He 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, ¹² and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

Can you picture this scene? Standing on the highest place overlooking Israel from Jordan, you can look out over the land on a clear day and see the Dead Sea to the south. You can look straight ahead and see lush green land with Jericho nearby. And you can see the Jordan River from the north. On this spot, the man who had spent most of his lifetime wandering in a wilderness, had finally arrived to this place which would be the view point of his dreams and the fulfillment of God's promise. This would be the land that God promised Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the family line could see from this precipice.

However, there is a twist, a tragic turn in this story for the one standing there whose life had been deeply emeshed in this vision. Moses, the prophet-deliverer, and law giver realized that he would never enter this land and enjoy the fulfillment of his dreams. Soon he would die there in the land of Moab (remember that Ruth was a Moabite) at age 120. How hard must it have been for this great leader of the Hebrew people to hear these words from the Lord, *"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."

Could he have wondered, like many of us might also have done, when we are facing down dreams that we know will go unrealized or incompleted for us, ***“Why can’t I go there, too?”***

How many of us have lived with this kind of frustration? We didn’t get the house we worked so hard for. We didn’t get into the school we hoped would land us a secure and lucrative job. We didn’t have the perfect child or the boy or girl that we wanted so badly. Instead we have a child with disabilities. We didn’t get selected as the most handsome or most attractive guy or girl in school. We were not even asked on that date with the dream girl to the big dance we had hoped, while sitting impatiently by the phone for that call that never came. We might not have bought the Fifth Avenue clothes, driven the slickest car, or gotten the tickets to the concert of the age. It just didn’t happen and may never as time marches on; and we get older and our wants and desires fade into the memory of yesterday’s “could have been” dreams?

Moses stood there looking into the Promised Land, the inheritance of a covenant from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (also Sara, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel), was within his grasp. But, it wasn't going to be in his hands ever. Didn't he deserve this Promised Land, his dream? Or, perhaps, there is a different question should be asked. Is our dream dead? Isn't the old must die to make way for the new dream?

What has to die? How will you honor what you will let go of, while still clearly letting go? Moses came as far as he could go on his journey with God in pursuit of the Promise given to his ancestors. Moses died gazing at the Promise but not entering and living into it fully. For him the dream was incomplete; but for others to follow, it was not incomplete. I know as a pastor that there have been many times when, as I was leaving an appointment, I knew that what had begun was not finished and may not ever be finished in my life time. Bishop Pennel once said to me that it was my duty to plant the seeds. Someone else will have to water them, nurture them and help them to produce the

good fruit that was intended in that seed, imbedded with so much raw potential.

When I left Boulevard Church, I said from the pulpit that one man with whom I had played cribbage was tied in wins and losses. We would never know who the best player was! More importantly, I left a place where a new idea had been birthed to help children, called “*Partners in learning and understanding children*” or simply the PLUS program. I had begun to see how caring for neighborhood children was also beginning to bring new life and hope of ministry within the walls of a church that had begun its death watch, sounding its awful death rattle. Some were valiantly and bravely seeking new ways, opening up the building and seeking to bring in all types of people from the community, which was kind of scary to many. When I left, I felt both sad and regretful that I could not finish the job. Boulevard Church is an urban church of an older generation where the average age was 75-80 years old. This church had to re-identify in ministry to new people and a new generation within the community. Many members died

and were dying (I buried over 20 in the first year) and others had moved away. The church was in a real danger of becoming a beautifully well maintained museum or a mausoleum. The dream of olden days was no longer valid.

When I left my next appointment, the church was on the verge of deciding to buy a new electronic sign – a very radical idea. It was costly; but we were sick and tired of one banner after another, wearing out, looking frazzled and not communicating well all of what was going on and being offered by the church. When I left, Dr. Ed Garret came to the church. He picked up the mantle and saw the dream, brining it to completion. So, every time I go through Sandston, I look and see what's going on in the church. Whenever any of us go together through Sandston, I do not hesitate to share this dream that Dr. Garrett and many wonderful lay people brought to fruition. It was not meant for me to go there.

I have always seen a certain kind of dream in the back of my mind. That dream was like Peter's dream, where a sheet opens up and all kinds of animals are presented. All these animals are no

longer unclean to Peter, because God makes them clean and offers them to him. Bishop Pennel said at a children's march at the Bell Tower on the Capitol Grounds that **God's dreams** are always larger than our dreams. Our dreams are so small in comparison.

Today, I am seeing some of this dream of all God's children in the Kingdom of God. It is what God meant to offer Christ to the entire world. Just imagine that some day, we will not fear or despise each other because we are different. We know now that this dream is possible when Jesus invites us to kneel before him and eat the bread and drink the cup of his holy meal.

We have to keep looking at this dream from different angles, seeing God's hand in it, and yearning for the day when all people will know it together. Why can't I go there too right this minute? I am impatient by nature. I am not ready perhaps or maybe we are not yet prepared in our hearts to be fully brothers and sisters.

This is the question for us as a church. *Where are we as a congregation in our journeys? Are we here at Lakeside United*

Methodist Church at the edge of a new place of promise? Can you see it? What's the view like?

Are we prepared to enter into this new place of promise? CBS 6 will soon begin broadcasting over the next year 50 times a month about this wonderful church. It is called ASK – Ask Seek and Knock. Are we ready to receive and to act in the hospitality of Christ? Do we have preparations to do? Are there things that must die before something new can happen? Do we need to let this time of waiting become a fallow ground to be prepared for new seeding?

Remember, Moses stood on Mt. Nebo to look over this new land of dreams. But, soon he died and a period of mourning began. Everything stood still in grief, waiting for 30 days before new leadership would take over, when Joshua would assume the task of entering the Promised Land of Canaan. This 30 day period is a fallow time of waiting and preparation. It was a vital time of transition.

Maybe we are in this time of transition, waiting, grieving, and exploring the vision God has for us? What is going to happen? How will we be changed or made different? What new thing will almighty God do through us? This is a fallow time, like a land that nurtures itself in a renewing energy of fertility. Questions arise. Uncertainty and fear rise to the surface.

What plans do we need to change or update in our building, in our worship, in our programs or in our missions to clear the way for this new course that takes us to where God wants us to go? Or will we just cling to, grab on the knot at the end of the rope and bewail our condition? What is God doing to us and in us to make a new day and a larger dream come into being?

Think about this. The real commandment that guides us is the same one that has guided the Hebrew in their laws and Jesus with his disciples. It is the response that Jesus gave to the Pharisee in the text in Matthew today, "***You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.***"³⁸ ***This is the greatest and first commandment.***³⁹ ***And a***

second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

(Matthew 22)

So the question is not, "Why can't I go there too?" It is much better to say, "How shall I love the Lord and my neighbor today and tomorrow?"

Amen.