



Proper 30, Year A – October 23, 2011

Deut. 34.1-12, Matt. 22.34-46

A Homily preached by the Rev'd Tara Livingston

Even when the work we do in this life, the only life we get, is good work, we rarely get to see the fruits of our labour. Moses is led to the top of the mountain and shown all of the rich land in which God's people will reside. From the Dan in the north, to Jericho, to the lush valley floor beside the Jordan river to the Dead Sea with its healing minerals; Moses sees it all but has been told he will not cross over. He has spent years following God's commands and leading his people from slavery to freedom and here, at the end, he stands on the cusp of the promised land but before the dream can be fulfilled for him, he dies there on the mountaintop after many years of faithful service.

It seems so unbelievably unfair. Moses, the leader who continued to act in loving ways to God's people even when he was angry, disappointed and disenchanted died on a mountaintop. Moses, the prophet who listened to God's commands and facilitated the provisions of manna and water in the desert is not able to step across in the land of milk and honey – the place where God's people will finally settle after years of wandering in the desert. Even in his vigorous condition Moses' body simply dies; dies at the command of God.

But even though Moses died before he could enter, where would we be without him? Where would we be without his willingness to step up and lead the slaves out of the only life they had ever known? Where would we be without his willingness to "love" them even when they complained and ranted, built false idols to worship and accused God of bringing them to the desert to die? But alas, it was not Moses' call to see God's plan come to its full fruition; his was to be a leader in God's great plan only for a short time, confident that the plan would continue to take shape long after he was gone.

This is the lot of many of us, each and every day. Those people some 99 years ago who began to envision a Church here in Elbow Park, a building on a hill in the middle of this neighbourhood knew that they may not see the fruits of their labour fulfilled. Those faithful Anglicans who were confident in the rightness of their vision, some who gave money and some who laid bricks, could not have conceived of the great legacy that they were beginning; a legacy which we now enjoy, but they undertook the task in faith; the faith that their beginnings would lead to a fruitful ministry at some time in the future and here we are.

The truth is that we seldom see the fruits of our labour. The seeds we sow – some good and some bad – occasionally come to light when we are no longer around to see the result. This can happen on a small scale, such as the seed that is planted when a teacher says good job or notices that a child has a particular talent and encourages them to pursue it, or on a large scale when a community such as this gathers together to take on big projects that we hope might change our little piece of the world.

Some of the seeds we've sown in our lives may be, in fact, bad seeds – those things that we've said impulsively about someone's lack of talent or quirky looks which haunt and resonate with that person long after we've left the room or even their life. I'm sure that we can all remember an otherwise innocuous moment in time when someone we loved and respected cut us to the core with a careless comment; one that haunts even 'til today. Even those legacies; those legacies that come from a slipshod place have staying power.

So the question for today is, what do you want your legacy to be? Are you willing to be conscious and aware of what you say and the actions you take knowing that they carry on long after the moment when you leave the room? Now, perfection is not required, thanks be to God, because even the Prophet Moses lost his temper with the Israelites but that never stopped him from carrying on. Even when he may not of been feeling all gushy in love with them, he continued to act in a loving and compassionate way.

In today's Gospel reading we hear Jesus recite the law; the two laws that are above all other laws. He tells his listeners not only must you love God, but to do so you must also love God's created people. Jesus is not talking about the gushy, emotional, head over heels love that we feel when we see our children after a long absence or meet our soul mate in those first few moments of attraction. No. Jesus is in fact reiterating the kind of love that Moses had for the Israelites – the action of love even when you're angry or disengaged. The acts of generosity, of compassion, of comfort for all of God's creation are what Jesus is asking of us here. And the fruits of such love last much longer than our fleeting contact with the people around us because they can in fact, change somebody's life.

So what act of agape or self giving love will you demonstrate to the people of God's creation? What are you willing to give your time, talents money and energy for, knowing that you may never see it come to fruition? Those original members of Christ Church almost a hundred years ago surely may not have envisioned the community that we have gathered here today but I am confident that they would be more than satisfied with the result. Even though they knew that they would never experience the full fruits of their labour, they gave their money, their time and their talents anyway in faith that God would continue the story long after they had gone.

Knowing that we are actually but a blip on the timeline that is God's does not stop us from moving towards a better future. It is faith that encourages us to hope beyond our own present for a future that we cannot know.

Marin Luther King Junior said:

"Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it 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."

We, together, can envision a future that we, together, want to work towards – even though we must accept that we may not, will not, be here to see its end. Just as we are the fulfillment in some ways of the vision of the original members of Christ Church, let us work towards a future, a legacy if you will, that requires that we have faith in God's vision for us in this community and live out the commandment to demonstrate love to one another through acts of compassion, of kindness and of generosity. Moses' fate, after all, the fate of death, is all of ours of course. Much of what we begin in faith will not be fulfilled within our life time but like Moses and Martin Luther King we are called to continue on in faith knowing that God has a vision and hope that is beyond our blip of time here on earth.

And for the present which we now enjoy and for the future that has not yet come but that we can envision, thanks be to God.