

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

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,

34:2 all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea,

34:3 the Negeb, and the Plain -- that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees -- as far as Zoar.

34:4 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."

34:5 Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command.

34:6 He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day.

34:7 Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigor had not abated.

34:8 The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended.

34:9 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.

34:10 Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.

34:11 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,

34:12 and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

Mahmoud Darwish – “In Jerusalem”

In Jerusalem, and I mean within the ancient walls,
I walk from one epoch to another without a memory

to guide me. The prophets over there are sharing
the history of the holy ... ascending to heaven
and returning less discouraged and melancholy, because love
and peace are holy and are coming to town.
I was walking down a slope and thinking to myself: How
do the narrators disagree over what light said about a stone?
Is it from a dimly lit stone that wars flare up?
I walk in my sleep. I stare in my sleep. I see
no one behind me. I see no one ahead of me.
All this light is for me. I walk. I become lighter. I fly
then I become another. Transfigured. Words
sprout like grass from Isaiah's messenger
mouth: "If you don't believe you won't be safe."
I walk as if I were another. And my wound a white
biblical rose. And my hands like two doves
on the cross hovering and carrying the earth.
I don't walk, I fly, I become another,
transfigured. No place and no time. So who am I?
I am no I in ascension's presence. But I
think to myself: Alone, the prophet Muhammad
spoke classical Arabic. "And then what?"
Then what? A woman soldier shouted:
Is that you again? Didn't I kill you?
I said: You killed me ... and I forgot, like you, to die.

SERMON:

A friend once told me about an exercise to do in times of trouble.

You lie on your back at night arms out feet apart (basically in the position of a star). and looking up at the stars on a clear night but imagine instead that you are looking down at the stars and that gravity is holding you.

The earth holds you to itself and says look! Look at the universe in all its majesty and infinite depth and beauty.

That is the same perspective Moses had as he gazed ahead at the Promised Land..so much possibility before the people he guided and he would remain right there in the earth.

Though Moses is not permitted to enter the land, he is given an extraordinary vision of it. Starting in the north, and sweeping west

and south, Moses sees the land that God is giving the Israelites. Standing on the border of that land, Moses sees the beginning of the fulfillment of the promises God made so long ago to the ancestors.

A lot has been done to explain why Moses never got to see the Promised Land. There is one Christian explanation which has to do with his being a “suffering servant”..he suffers and dies on behalf of his people—a precursor to Jesus.

Many Jewish scholars mostly take the verse in Numbers 20:12 as the answer: ...the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.”

But we have been witness to the ways Moses has been able to change God’s minds about things so we can’t be fully persuaded that what God said in that moment wouldn’t change the next..

In Hebrews 11, written by a Jewish Christian, there is a long chapter about the faith of the patriarchs which says this about Moses:

23 By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.

24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. 25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.

28 By faith he kept the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

29 By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned

The most common explanation, however, is that when they were at Meribah after Miriam died, the people did not believe God could call forth water from a rock and God blamed Moses. So it was for his grief and the lack of faith of the people which kept Moses from his final reward.

This last image of grief at the death of his sister and in ability to simply “believe” the natural world had what they all needed is so human and easy to believe. Regardless of our faith or politics we can be grief stricken at the death of women and children as we watch the devastation in Israel and Palestine and blind to solutions which may well be within reach.

So many of us will die with the unfulfilled vision of a Holy Land where all three Abrahamic faiths live peacefully.

The poem written by Mahmoud Darwish reminds us of how quickly we can go from the broad daylight of possibility to the shadows of our souls.

He writes:

*my hands like two doves
on the cross hovering and carrying the earth.
I don't walk, I fly, I become another,
transfigured. No place and no time.
So who am I?
I am no I in ascension's presence.*

*But I think to myself: Alone, the prophet Muhammad
spoke classical Arabic. “And then what?”
Then what?*

Darwish then points out that Muhammad spoke Arabic pointing to the inevitability of our always coming from a personal, political point of view.

Darwish used Palestine as a metaphor for the loss of Eden, birth and resurrection, and the anguish of dispossession and exile.

Ironically Darwish was buried at the summit of a hill overlooking Jerusalem on the southwestern outskirts of Ramallah, and a shrine would be erected in his honor.^[43] Ahmed Darwish said "Mahmoud doesn't just belong to a family or a town, but to all the Palestinians, and he should be buried in a place, where all Palestinians can come and visit him."^[76]

Despite his criticism of both Israel and the Palestinian leadership, Darwish believed that peace was attainable. *"I do not despair,"* he told the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*. *"I am patient and am waiting for a profound revolution in the consciousness of the Israelis. The Arabs are ready to accept a strong Israel with nuclear arms – all it has to do is open the gates of its fortress and make peace."*¹

Similarly our own Martin Luther King Jr used the same scripture on April 3, 1968, the night before he was assassinated. He addressed the crowd in Memphis: He wrote:

*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.*²

There are so many promised lands we yearn for these days
Not the least of which is peace on earth
Much less a habitable planet
The end to poverty
Equal rights
Perhaps we might even say happiness...
Jesus boils it all down in the scripture we read responsively

Love God

¹ [Diaa Hadid, "Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish dead at 67", Seattle Times, 9 August 2008](#)

² ³*A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 286.

Love your neighbor
Pour the milk of human kindness on every wound
Delight in the world God created and is creating
As simple as that

But, as Darwish pointed out, the wilderness of the human mind is fraught so we turn, we turn inward to the shadowlands of our souls.

However if we lie on our backs looking at the full harvest moon and stars and remember the beautiful earth that is holding us and which has held people for thousands and thousands of years.

And we watch for hope in our children we can find light again.

“We are heard!” a young person exclaimed³in Montana after a state judge in Montana gave climate activists a decisive win on Monday when she ruled that the state’s support of fossil fuels violates their constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment.

Kian Tanner, one of the 16 youth plaintiffs in the lawsuit, said in a statement that he grew up near the Flathead River and testified to watching wildfires come ever closer to his home each year. “Frankly, the elation and joy in my heart is overwhelming in the best way. We set the precedent not only for the United States, but for the world.” Such hope!!

Yehuda Amichai ended the poem we heard last week in this way:

“I believe with perfect faith that at this very moment millions of human beings are standing at crossroads and intersections, in jungles and deserts, showing each other where to turn, what the right way is, which direction. They explain exactly where to go, what is the quickest way to get there, when to stop and ask again. There, over there. The second turnoff, not the first, and from there left or right,

³ <https://www.wired.com/story/montana-youth-win-a-historic-climate-case/#:~:text=A%20state%20judge%20in%20Montana,a%20clean%20and%20healthful%20environm ent.>

near the white house, by the oak tree.
They explain with excited voices, with a wave of the hand
and a nod of the head: There, over there, not that there, the other
there, as in some ancient rite. This too he writes is a new religion.
I believe with perfect faith that at this very moment⁴.

Let us pray:

Dear God,
Comfort us in our weariness and grief at the suffering and
devastation in the world.
Take us to high mountains and green valleys for rest
Help us remember the many neighbors we have who are working in
infinite ways for peace
And may we love them as we love ourselves
when times are hard
And when we are filled with joy.

Amen. Yehuda Amichai, "I Wasn't One of the Six Million: And What is My Life Span? Open Closed Open"
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