[Start Video after Amen]

Yes, that was Charlton Heston from the 1956 movie, The Ten Commandments. I'm pretty sure I read somewhere that it's sacrilegious to talk about Moses without showing at least one clip of the way we know him best.

Our passage today from Deuteronomy brings us to the final scene of Moses' life. After years of struggle, courage, leadership, and uncertainty, Moses climbs Mount Nebo and looks across the land towards which he has led the people. God lets Moses see the promised land, but he doesn't get to enter it. Moses' story ends not with possession, but with perspective; not with personal achievement, but with the continuation of his community's journey. This passage is a call to reflect on the life of Moses and the reasons why the writer of our passage could say at the end, Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. 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, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

A proper reflection of Moses' life must go back to where it all began. He was born in a time of great danger. Into a world where those in power feared the abundant growth of a vulnerable people. Pharoah's decree to kill all newborn boys should have prevented all that would later happen in Moses' life. But Moses' family acted courageously to protect him. His life preserved through the compassion of others. From the beginning, Moses' story reminds us that no one becomes who they are alone. His life was sustained by parents, midwives, a sister, a stranger, a foreign princess, and a community willing to stand against injustices in their society. To resist the forces of death.

Later, Moses encountered God in the wilderness, receiving a calling to confront Pharaoh and lead the Israelites to freedom. Moses didn't feel ready. He questioned his abilities, his speech, and his own authority. But God's call did not depend on Moses being perfect or fearless. It all depended on his willingness to take the next step.

That's good news for us church family. A calling doesn't have to come in the form of dramatic revelations or clearly marked paths. Often, it comes as the persistent sense that the world can be more just, more compassionate, and more whole and the realization that we can play a part in making it so. Like Moses, we might feel inadequate. But courage is not the absence of uncertainty. Courage is choosing faithfulness in the presence of uncertainty.

Moses' central work was not to build a monument to himself. It was to help an oppressed people move toward freedom. The exodus was more than a change of location; it was a transformation of identity. The Israelites would no longer be a people controlled by an empire. They would become a people responsible for each other.

Don't you think that this is an important distinction? Freedom is more than release from one form of oppression. It is the ongoing work of creating a community where people can live with dignity and share resources. Where they protect the vulnerable and make room for every voice. Moses led the people out of Egypt, but the work of becoming a just community had a long road ahead. It involved a journey through the wilderness.

This shows us that progress rarely happens in a straight line. The Israelites would experience fear, conflict, disappointment, and longing for the familiar—even when the familiar was oppressive. Moses himself experienced frustration and exhaustion. None of this stopped the journey. The pathway to freedom requires patience, accountability, and the willingness to keep moving even when the destination is not yet visible.

Deuteronomy does not present Moses as flawless. He was courageous, but impatient. He listened for God's guidance but sometimes struggled to listen to the Israelites. He carried great responsibility but didn't always carry it wisely. His life included mistakes and consequences, as well as moments of profound faith.

Moses' life shows us that a leader does not have to be perfect to be meaningful. Moses' greatness wasn't that he never failed; it was that he continued to seek justice, to advocate for his people, and to remain accountable to a purpose that he knew was greater than himself.

This passage challenges the idea that one person must carry everything. Moses' story includes the work of Miriam, Aaron, Joshua, elders, families, and the entire community. The future does not depend on a single heroic individual. Healthy communities share leadership, welcome new voices, and prepare for a time when one generation hands responsibility to the next.

On Mount Nebo, Moses looks across the Jordan and sees the promised land. Because of something that happened along the journey, God showed him the promise, but Moses wasn't allowed to enter it. Talk about being painful and unfair! After all Moses endured, why shouldn't he experience the fulfillment of his work?

Who else has experienced disappointment like this? I sure have. There are going to be times when we work for reconciliation but do not see the wounds fully healed. When we advocate for justice but do not see every unjust system transformed. When we plant trees whose shade we may never enjoy. When we teach, organize, mentor, vote, create, and serve, knowing that the world we hope for may be completed by people who come after us.

This is like a someone who plants a small orchard beside a community gathering place. When people walk past they asks, "Why put in all that work? Those trees will take years to bear fruit." The planter presses the soil around a sapling and answers, "When I came here, someone had already planted the trees that shaded my walk. I never met them. But I get to rest beneath the branches of those trees. Now I can leave something for someone I may never meet." The planter returns with water, season after season, not because a harvest is guaranteed, but because a future worth tending is already taking root. This is Moses on the mountain. He doesn't take the next step into the promised land, but the people he led there will.

Which begs the question, What can we plant, nurture, or make possible today that someone else will one day receive as a gift?

Moses' life teaches us that the value of our work is not measured only by the results we personally see. Often, the most important work we do sets the stage for a future we may not inhabit. Faithfulness is not the same as control. The call is to participate in the work of healing. It's not about possessing the final outcome.

After Moses' death, Joshua leads the people forward. This transition isn't because Moses is a failure; it is the natural movement of a living community. Moses' role was essential, but not permanent. His leadership made room for another kind of leadership suited to handle the next stage for the Israelites.

The gifts of each generation are gifts the next generation needs. At some point, each generation must also release control. Those who are mature offer wisdom, memory, and perspective. Those who are young bring imagination, energy, and new questions. A community is strongest when gifts are shared rather than pitted against one another.

A faithful legacy shouldn't demand a repeat of its methods. It should be an invitation to continue the future work with courage and creativity. Moses didn't need Joshua to become another Moses. Joshua needed to become the leader his moment required.

Deuteronomy 34 is not only about the end of Moses' life. It is also about the presence of God throughout his life. God was present in the basket among the reeds, in the wilderness, at the burning bush, in the confrontation with Pharaoh, in the uncertainty of the desert, and on the mountain where Moses saw the promise from a distance.

God's presence was not confined to the moment when everything worked out. It was present in the difficult middle: when the people complained, when the path was unclear, and when Moses had to lead without knowing exactly how the story would end.

That may be where many of us are living now—in the middle of a journey. We may not see the full answer to our prayers or the completion of our work. Yet the absence of completion is not the absence of meaning. A life can be holy even when it remains unfinished.

Moses died with his vision clear, but his work incomplete. He helped free a people, shape a community, confront injustice, and prepare the way for those who came after him. His life was not a waste because he didn't cross the final boundary. Moses' life mattered because he helped the people move toward a future of freedom.

We may not accomplish everything we hope to. We may not see the justice we seek, the reconciliation we pray for, or the healing we labor toward. But we can still live faithfully. We can resist oppression, protect the vulnerable, share leadership, welcome new voices, and make the path wider for those who follow.

The question, then, is not only, "What will I achieve?" It is also, "What will my life make possible for others?" (repeat, have everyone ask their neighbor)

Church family, hear me when I say this. Your lives are part of a larger story. Be courageous enough to begin. Be humble enough to change. Be wise enough to share responsibility. Be gracious enough to release the future into the hands of others And by that we might discover that even if we cannot enter every promised land, we can still help create a world in which others may flourish.