

KING OF KINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH



Numbers 27:12-23

Doing As the Lord Commands

One cannot debate the importance of the work that Moses carried out for God's people. Nor can one debate the godliness of Moses. Moses went alone to receive the law and the tablets with the Ten Commandments from God. God spoke ***"to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend"*** (Exodus 33:11). When rebels spoke against Moses, God threatened to wipe out the whole nation of Israel, but preserve only Moses. The book of Deuteronomy concludes with these words about Moses: ***"Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel"*** (Deuteronomy 34:10–12).

The account in our First Lesson has the striking consequences for *one* error on the part of this great man of faith and service to God. A few chapters before our text, the forty years of wondering in the wilderness had come to an end. The people were assembled at Kadesh and, as they tended to do, they began to complain about the conditions and blamed Moses and Aaron. They wished they had died in Egypt or in the desert. They complained that they had no food or water.

Moses and Aaron intervened for the people. They went into the Tent of Meeting and bowed before the Lord. God instructed Moses to take his staff and speak to the rock outside of camp and it would pour out water.

Moses took the staff and went out before the people. He said, ***"Listen, you rebels, must we bring water out of this rock?"*** And then he struck the rock twice with the staff. Water poured out. (Numbers 20:10-11)

God immediately noticed the difference between what he commanded and what Moses did. God told Moses that because he didn't trust God enough to do as commanded ***"You will not bring this community into the land I give them"*** (Numbers 20:12).

In our First Lesson, Moses was confronted with the reality of God's decree. He was appointing Joshua to be the next leader of the Israelites. God's threat was not an idle threat; after years of faithful service, Moses wasn't going to set foot in the Promised Land.

It seems harsh and perhaps unfair. No one worked harder than Moses to get the Children of Israel to the Promised Land.

But this was not an arbitrary action of God. Nor was it the way the "Old Testament God" acted, but we live under a kinder, gentler version of God. God has always been very serious about his will. God reminded Moses of his sin. In our text he said, ***"For when the community rebelled at the waters in the Desert of Zin, both of you (Moses and Aaron) disobeyed my command to honor me as holy before their eyes."*** The end is important. Moses didn't honor God as holy in the eyes of the Israelites. He spoke harshly to the people that God wanted to be merciful to. Moses took credit for helping instead of pointing to God's grace. Moses did it his way — hitting the rock instead of speaking to it — instead of obeying God.

Among the inspired points in our Second Lesson is the direction from God that we are to take his Word seriously and listen to those who accurately and faithfully teach it to us.

We can make excuses for Moses' actions. He was frustrated after nearly forty years of leading the rebellious Israelites. In a moment of weakness he lashed out and said some things he

probably didn't mean. And while those excuses may make sense to us, they didn't work with God. (Actually, Moses knew better than to try and argue and didn't even make excuses.)

We can make excuses for our sins too. "Everybody does it" seems like a pretty powerful argument. So does "It didn't hurt anybody." "We live in the 21st Century" seems to excuse us from a variety of sins. As always, "It is what I wanted to do" is often considered an accepted reason.

But then we are confronted with the New Testament imperative:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial (the devil)? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord." 2 Corinthians 6:14-17

The standard which God would hold us to is not what our society says is right or wrong, but what he has proclaimed in his Word. Sexual sins — from what happens in the bedroom to what happens on the internet to what happens in movies and TV — remain wickedness before God. Ignoring God's Word and not making time to grow in God's Word remain a violation of a Commandment that God carved into stone for Moses. Abusing God's gifts like alcohol will never be right. Forsaking our roles in marriage to do what we want or because it is too hard to be selfless are never going to be godly. The world doesn't get a say in this!

The lesson that Moses learned is important for all of us to learn. Sin is not a minor, light matter to be indulged without expecting trouble.

And yet there is something else remarkable about Moses' sin. Moses remained a man of faith.

When the consequences of his sin were announced and carried out, it never meant Moses lost his place before God. In the chapter after Moses' sin we have the account of the bronze snake. Moses again appealed to God when the people rebelled. This time God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Those who looked in faith to would be cured of their snake bites. He would continue to faithfully serve God, even as he accepted the consequences of his sinful action.

Our sins do not mean that God is done with us. We too have forgiveness. We see it clearly in the work of Jesus Christ, who was symbolized by the bronze snake. We look in faith to Christ and in him find full forgiveness. His death on the cross was the payment we owed to God. His resurrection crushed the curse of death.

Like Moses, we are forgiven and restored. The consequences of a past sin may linger for a longtime. Let that be a reminder to you of your need for Christ. Now, as a restored child of God because of Jesus, set aside what you think is right and best and listen to God's Word. If that means that the TV is turned off, fine. If you cannot see a movie because it is sinful, accept God's will. If your habits and way of speaking need to change, do it. In his grace, God forgives us. Don't treat that forgiveness as a license to keep sinning.

The disciples in our Gospel Lesson gathered around Jesus to listen to him teach. Could they hear his instruction and then ignore it? I suppose some did. But what foolishness!

The Lord God has taught you his truth. Listen. Heed God's commands. Trust in Christ for forgiveness. Put that faith into practice and give careful thought to you ways. Where sin lives and grows in your life, turn back to Jesus. Like Moses, you will find a loving God and the power of renewal for a continue life of service. Amen.

9th Sunday after Pentecost
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