

Sermon 26 October 2014 'Endings and beginnings'  
Deut 34:1-12 Psalm 90: 1-6, 13-17

*Prayer: God in who we dwell, we know our past but not our future. Grant us love and support as we use these present moments to reflect on the story of the last days of Moses, and ponder the endings and beginnings of our own journeys. Amen.*

Endings and beginnings = the story of the butterfly – **right?** What is the ending for one is the beginning for another. This is the **reality** of our living and for Christians the reality of our faith. The ending of this life is the beginning of another – and yes it is possible that the next life is nothing like our first one – but... *but* then again it might be!

Whatever shape or form we have and will have, we will be in God, *according to* the Psalm today. This is the only psalm attributed to Moses. His prayer transmitted through time to us, for us. <sup>\*1</sup>It opens with a focus on trust which fits the story of Moses life perfectly! His faith journey as he led the Israelites out of Egypt to the Promised Land. Some of that journey we followed, but more of it has been left for another year!

In this psalm the focus is on God, the “Lord” a traditional name for God from the very beginning of the Bible, the creation traditions. But what I find fascinating is that in this psalm, the ‘Lord’ is described as our dwelling place, sometimes translated as our ‘refuge’. Scholars would tell us this is an important shift in God-thinking, *then* and I want to say – now!

The use of the Hebrew word ‘dwelling-place’ is rare in the psalms; it is used only 4 times. In the other 3 times cf. Pss 26:8; 68:6; and 71:3 it refers to a physical location – especially the Temple in the first 2. BUT in Psalm 90:1 it means God, the Lord. (cf. Deut 33.27). This shifts our attention from places where God dwells, to God the Lord being the one in whom the community dwells. H Wallace says this “is a fitting word when all other institutions of the faith have failed at one time or another.” Cv

The richness of this offering for us today, from the life story of Moses is great. Moses who knew what it was to be adopted, to live in a bi-cultural marriage, who knew what it was to be super rich and to only have the clothes on his back, who had to fight to claim his birth-right, who had extra-ordinary experiences of the Living God – who could out-magician the best in the world, (the fights in Pharaoh’s court when Moses was asking for Pharaoh to let the people go); Moses who taught his *city slave-bred* peoples and their children to live in tents, in the desert and to travel – journey together for over 40 years. The man – **only man ever** who has been <sup>\*2</sup> **embraced by God face to face** – and I could go on nearly as much as the writer in Deuteronomy.

Let me take a small detour here, in Deuteronomy, when the writer is telling us about Moses death. We are also told in Vs7 that: “Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not **weak** nor his strength gone.” This is the ancient’s way of saying what a great leader he was. <sup>\*1</sup> In the ancient world, famous leaders were marked by their physical attributes (cf. Saul {1 Sam 9:1-2} and David {1 Sam 16:12}). So it is saying, listen up- Moses was a great leader and he was 120 years old...

So Moses with all his 120 years of faith inspired wisdom; Moses tells us that we live in/ dwell in the Lord, and it’s *not just* us but **all** through the generations... We do not live in buildings with our faith, for faith but in the Lord. Fitting wisdom from a man on the move! **Easily agreed to, right???** –We all agree with Moses? **But** *when* I wear my regional church hat, and have to work with churches who are struggling with letting go of their buildings – their “churches” and I see a different response. CV

Next year we celebrate being 40! The need for planning to enable us to celebrate this has been recognised and so begun by Judy and Liz. But what a struggle it would be if we had to ‘rationalise’ or

<sup>\*1</sup> H Wallace <sup>\*2</sup> SacraConversaZione

dissolve our congregation – or close – would it be easy??? **No and Thank the Lord** not needed – *for us...* But the question remains **would we be able to live in** Moses claim that the Lord is our dwelling place – and not a physical building? I wonder!

It takes a different kind of vision to see life beyond the ‘walls’ and Moses had it! The Lord gave to Moses ‘vision’ and today we heard about the vision of the Promised Land. We had a <sup>\*1</sup> lengthy description of the Promised Land, and it is for our benefit *because* there is no possible way Moses could have literally ‘seen’ it all. Apparently <sup>\*1</sup>if you stand at the top of Mt Nebo and look over the Jordan, you soon realise that, even on a very clear day, not all that is described would actually be visible to Moses. So we ‘see’ it through his eyes and what he ‘sees’ in the story is the fullness of God’s promise.

Without pushing the analogy too far, this has been the case all along. Moses’ ‘vision’ has been inspired by the spirit of wisdom with which he has been gifted and which he will now pass to Joshua (v. 9) rather than the limits of his own vision. Endings and beginnings – Moses time is ending and Joshua’s time begins. Not the same shape, but then not the same needs – no longer are God’s people on a physical journey, now they are heading into ‘land’, **promised** land to settle down, becoming farmers, towns and city people’s *again*.

Transitions belong to our living, beginning and endings are us! From our first breath that we breathe we begin a journey that the physical part ends with our death. In the physical; we feel – we get hurt – we laugh, we grieve, we are filled with joy and peace and... – and we make choices and our lives change dramatically but **through it all** when we live in the Lord – we are held, kept, challenged and loved into being the best person we possibly can be. cv

We are loved by the Lord in whom we live! We are loved enough for the Lord to be “afflicted” says Moses in the psalm; and loved enough to know the favour of the Lord rests on us; loved enough to respond in song and with joy. **Yes** we know “troubles” but we **also know** the Lord. Moses’s trouble today was that he was only allowed to ‘see’ the Promised Land, but not to go in.

But he is loved *enough* for the Lord to give him the vision of the land and <sup>\*1</sup> *and* in the ancient world he is given a grave with no marker, the **highest** sign of **respect** that they could give! What a difference to our world where we **place** physical markers so we can go to a ‘place’ and show our respect for those who have left this physical world to us! cv

I wonder if our need – our world’s need for the physical is a symptom of our inability to **live in the Lord**. Letting go of a life-style, or a loved one is hard – very hard, but our peoples have been doing it since creation! Moses specialised in it – whether it was a life-style or loved one and when he died his people grieved – for 30 days. But then they got up and move on – endings and beginnings that’s what life is about. We cannot stay locked to the ending – **if / when** we are people in the Lord. There is always a beginning – different in shape, size, flavour... even perhaps ‘world’ but the Lord in whom we live gives us a vision of what’s next!

Moses’s psalm reminds us of how in our ending / our death we return to our beginnings – earth to earth – dust to dust which has echoes the stories of creation – our beginning time. So it is no surprise that the psalm moves straight into a consideration of time – our time measures and the Lords! We hold ourselves in such high regard and yet in the Lord we are but a day’s offering to the life of the world! *Even* the greatest of greats – Moses’ life came to an end and he had to hand over to Joshua the Spirit of Wisdom that he, **Joshua might begin**. That’s the way of life – right? When we **live in the Lord** endings are only beginnings. Amen