

**HEBREW SCRIPTURE, Psalm 90:1-6,13-17**

NRSV

**90** <sup>1</sup>Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.  
<sup>2</sup>Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.  
<sup>3</sup>You turn us back to dust, and say, “Turn back, you mortals.”  
<sup>4</sup>For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.  
<sup>5</sup>You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning;  
<sup>6</sup>in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.

<sup>12</sup>**So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.**  
<sup>13</sup>Turn, O LORD! How long? Have compassion on your servants!  
<sup>14</sup>Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.  
<sup>15</sup>Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us, and as many years as we have seen evil.  
<sup>16</sup>Let your work be manifest to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.  
<sup>17</sup>Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands— O prosper the work of our hands!

**STEWARDSHIP SCRIPTURE, 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 Common English Bible (CEB)**

**8** Brothers and sisters, we want to let you know about the grace of God that was given to the churches of Macedonia. <sup>2</sup>While they were being tested by many problems, their extra amount of happiness and their extreme poverty resulted in a surplus of rich generosity. <sup>3</sup>I assure you that they gave what they could afford and even more than they could afford, and they did it voluntarily. <sup>4</sup>They urgently begged us for the privilege of sharing in this service for the saints. <sup>5</sup>They even exceeded our expectations, because they gave themselves to the Lord first and to us, consistent with God’s will.

**HEBREW SCRIPTURE, Deuteronomy 34:1-12**

CEB

**34** Then Moses hiked up from the Moabite plains to Mount Nebo, the peak of the Pisgah slope, which faces Jericho. The LORD showed him the whole land: the Gilead region as far as Dan’s territory; <sup>2</sup>all the parts belonging to Naphtali along with the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, as well as the entirety of Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea; <sup>3</sup>also the arid southern plain, and the plain—including the Jericho Valley, Palm City—as far as Zoar.

<sup>4</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses: “This is the land that I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when I promised: ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have shown it to you with your own eyes; however, you will not cross over into it.”

<sup>5</sup>Then Moses, the LORD’s servant, died—right there in the land of Moab, according to the LORD’s command. <sup>6</sup>The Lord buried him in a valley in Moabite country across from Beth-peor. Even now, no one knows where Moses’ grave is.

<sup>7</sup>Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eyesight wasn’t impaired, and his vigor hadn’t diminished a bit.

<sup>8</sup> Back down in the Moabite plains, the Israelites mourned Moses' death for thirty days. At that point, the time for weeping and for mourning Moses was over.

<sup>9</sup> Joshua, Nun's son, was filled with wisdom because Moses had placed his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to Joshua, and they did exactly what the LORD commanded Moses.

<sup>10</sup> No prophet like Moses has yet emerged in Israel; Moses knew the LORD face-to-face! <sup>11</sup> That's not even to mention all those signs and wonders that the LORD sent Moses to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh, to all his servants, and to his entire land— <sup>12</sup> as well as all the extraordinary power that Moses displayed before Israel's own eyes!

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I'd like to start out this morning by telling you a story about a man that I truly admire. His parents were unable to raise him, so they gave him up for adoption. By good fortune he was adopted by a woman who was pretty well off. His adoptive grandfather was wealthy as well and, as a consequence, he had every opportunity for education and advancement that anyone could ask for and of which he took full advantage.

But, when he reached adulthood, he had a falling out with his family -- which, if you think about, is not so unusual at that age. Unfortunately, in this case it was permanent. So, with pretty much what he had on his back, he left home. He traveled around a bit; saw parts of the world. Then met a woman whom he cared for. They married and had a family. She was a rancher's daughter, so he was able to get a job working for her father.

Then he had a call to ministry. I can attest to how these calls can come out of the blue and I related to his story. He was out herding cattle when he distinctively heard God calling him to the ministry -- particular justice ministry with people who are oppressed. He protested, of course. He was neither a rich woman's son anymore nor was he a spiritual leader! He liked his simple little life as a rancher's son-in-law, providing a living as husband and father.

This call seemed all too risky and -- quite frankly -- unsettling of his now safe little, quiet life. Additionally, he had a speech impediment which always made him hesitant to do any work with people. He'd rather manage things and animals rather than people! (I suspect some of you can relate?!)

But I can also attest to that fact that God can be persuasive and ultimately, this guy decided to take the risk and throw his hat into the ring to do the work to which God was calling him.

He had a real heart for refugees, a passion that propelled him forward in

his new career even though he wasn't always successful. It was more than a little bit bumpy at first. Half the time, he wasn't sure what he was even doing, and the other half of the time even if he was *somewhat* on target, he usually felt like he was fumbling the ball.

But I admired his perseverance as he ultimately grew into a very effective communicator and advocate for oppressed people. He changed the lives of thousands of people! *Thousands* of people! Can you imagine?!

What I really admired most was his relationship with God. It was so intimate. It was like he talked to God face-to-face. Wow!

And yet -- when he died at a ripe old age, he ultimately *failed* in his original goal, his original call. You see, he had *intended* to relocate a group of refugees to a far better place, one which they could call their own. But, well, history happened. There were wars that made it impossible. Then there was a lack of resources. Sometimes there was a lack of leadership.

At times he felt like he had to do everything all by himself. But that's when he learned to become fully dependent on God and he felt a peace that was hard to describe or explain to others. And yet, even so, *he never succeeded in that original goal*. He took it as far as he could and then his successor -- who had been his assistant, mind you -- got all the credit for completion. (I don't suppose that has ever happened to any of you?)

Anyway, I began to think, well, then why did he bother even *starting*? Why didn't he pick a more *reasonable* goal? You know, something that he could actually *achieve*. Something that, when he got to the end of his life, he could say to everyone -- with a great deal of satisfaction -- "*I did it!* I set out to do something meaningful and I got it accomplished! And now? *Now*, I can die in peace."

But he never got a chance to get it done. So, as wonderful and adventurous as his life was -- *was it really a success?* What do *you* think?

Perhaps you've notice that I've never said his name? I suppose I should tell you who I'm talking about. His name was...Moses. If you figured out that I was telling you a Bible story in contemporary terms, good for you! But I *really* wanted you to relate to my hero.

As we read this morning, he is remembered as a *great man of God*, one who heard God's call on his life and followed it and who used his life in service to what God asked of him to do -- even though he didn't see it finished.

And yet, Moses has been such an inspiration down the ages. In our present age, or at this point our recent past -- perhaps Martin Luther King, Jr. is the most well known. I get excited when I realize that Martin read the same passage that we did this morning. And I know this because of what

he said in one of his speeches which he gave to a crowd in Memphis one night . In it he said these (perhaps familiar) words:

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

Martin spoke those words on April 3, 1968...and *died* the very next day. As the psalmist said this morning, we are "like grass that is renewed in the morning; <sup>6</sup> in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers. As the psalmist said to God this morning, "you turn us back into dust." And -- given the jukebox that's always playing in my head, I'm reminded of the way a 1967 song called "Get Together" put it:

Some may come and some may go  
 We shall surely pass  
 When the One that left us here  
 Returns for us at last  
 We are but a moment's sunlight  
 Fading in the grass

And then they made their appeal to us:

Come on people now  
 Smile on your brother  
 Everybody get together  
 Try to love one another  
 Right now

That song was from *fifty* years ago. The psalms of the psalmist and the stories of Moses are from *thousands* of years ago. So, knowing that what the psalmist -- and the singers -- said is true...and knowing the story of Moses, then, what is *our* appeal to the world going to be in this time? In 2018?

Just last month, we said good bye to Lorraine Volgmuth. And her family, her friends, and her church family and friends told the story of her life and what she meant to them. At a cottage meeting, Lorraine told me how this church was there extended family. She and Bob were only children. And you all became the extended family of mothers and fathers, sisters and

brothers, and cousins for their daughters. *You! You* did that. Did you know?

Today, we are reflecting on the fact that we have been gathered in to *this space, this place, this time* -- our connection to God and each other -- as we consider how fleeting life is while being challenged by Moses to make our life make a difference.

Back in the 1700s famous historical Methodists named George Whitefield and Jesse Lee preached in Milford -- in the lifetime of our founder, John Wesley! That's rich! But it wasn't until the 1800s that a couple of local guys -- Eliakim Fenn and Thomas Burwell decided to start praying together at Burwell's farm. The following year -- which was 1836 -- they formed a Methodist church. It was in the warm days of summer -- August 12, 1836 -- to be exact, that 11 folks from the Congregational Churches and two from other Methodist Churches, formed a church.

For years it was touch and go. Sometimes it grew a bit; sometimes it receded. These Methodists, they met in the kitchen of a farm house, in a shoe shop, in a Baptist Church, back into a kitchen -- Mr. Fowler's kitchen, for those of you who know that name, and then for prayers at Nathan Gunn's house -- another name some of you might know. Pastors and preachers came and went, but this gathering called Methodists persevered!

The Civil War. World War I. The Great Depression. World War II. Myrtle Beach Community Church built, built again -- by the hands of Methodists only as resources became available. When children spontaneously combusted into a Sunday School in Myrtle Beach, the Holy Spirit inspired a Mrs. Burgess to nurture the gathering in her home, until Mary Taylor Memorial helped to fund the venture, so that the children of Myrtle Beach could scurry to the Myrtle Beach Methodist Church in their neighborhood.

Then, one day: No feud. Rather, an arranged marriage -- or maybe -- better -- a family reunion. As the modern age came about and development pushed out the Myrtle Beach site, two congregations became one, here, at this site. But both -- separately and together -- had a passion for being the church for *this place, this Milford* in which we live.

Their legacy lives on in you today. You care very much for our children, for this community and for the surrounding communities. And in our ever-extending, now world community their fierceness lives in you as you provide welcome to the immigrant, the stranger, and to people of differing gender and sexual identities. *You* do that! You are a part of a very present, dynamic community which is poised *now* to do... *what?*

You are gathered in to *this place, this space, and this time* not just for yourselves but to start things for the generations to come -- who will likely have to finish what we started -- just like Moses -- when we're gone.

You are not gathered in solely to give your children a Christian Education, or for the fellowship, or even to simply worship God. This is *your time* -- as individuals and as a community -- to *shine*. To catch a glimpse of God's vision for our community and our world today -- and then to be part of that vision.

Through your tithes and offerings you secure this sacred place for this generation with an eye on the generation to come in the future *which is not ours*.

Through the ways you reach out to the world beyond here and through all the ways you serve this community, you secure this sacred place for this generation with an eye on the generation to come in the future *which is not ours*.

Through your leadership that opens the doors of these buildings to the community for the building up of character, the healing of wounds, and for fellowship -- in these ways, you secure this sacred place for this generation with an eye on the generation to come in the future *which is not ours...but is God's*.

The community of Mary Taylor Memorial 50 years from now will be largely influenced by what *we choose to do in our time, right here, right now*.

Whose future is it? It's *God's* future. The God who has gathered us in this morning. The God who has a call on your life. The One who calls us out of our safe little lives that we might live into the supersized life that God has for each one of us and for us as a community.

How can we participate in God's future...*now*?

You have been gathered in to Mary Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church for such a time as this. How will you use the time that you have? What legacy will you leave for the future?

Listen to God's voice. Catch a glimpse of God's vision. And ***make your mark***.

Blessings on the journey. Amen.