

They spent generations battling against the peoples of Canaan to establish their dominance in God's Promised Kingdom. It would be nearly 300 years before Israel lived in peace under King David.

But Moses would not be around to see this new Kingdom. Even as he viewed the great expanse of Canaan, Moses heard God say to him: *I have let you see [the Promised Land] with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it* (v. 4). Moses belonged to that first generation of ex-Hebrew slaves who questioned God and God's motives for leading them out into the desert. They complained about the food and the water and the weather and the critters, and God got angry. God decreed that the complainers would not reach the Promised Land (hence the 40 years of wandering while they died out). Moses was part of this complaining generation, but God rewarded his faithfulness in leading the people through the wilderness by allowing Moses to see the Promised Land from the summit of Mount Nebo. Then Moses died. Moses did not cross the Jordan River or enter the Promised Land: he died, having seen the Promised Land, but not reaching it.

It almost seems cruel, doesn't it? Moses did what God asked of him, he stood up to Pharaoh, he led the Hebrew people out of slavery and through the desert wanderings, he addressed their daily needs and adjudicated their grievances, and now he dies just when the goal is in sight. That's harsh! That's unfair! Remember God's words? "I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it." Just like a kid at the window of the candy store: Moses could look, but he couldn't touch. I'll bet the view from the summit of Mount Nebo was breathtaking! I bet Moses' heart beat faster with excitement! What a let-down, then, for Moses to hear that he would not see the reward for his life's work.

Now fast-forward to the days just after the Resurrection of Jesus. The disciples meet with Jesus and they ask him: *Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?* (v. 6). After the tumultuous events of the crucifixion and the joyous reunion after the resurrection, the disciples are expecting Jesus to do something even more amazing. (As if there could be anything more amazing than the resurrection!) Knowing what Jesus is capable of doing, the disciples are expecting nothing less than an overthrow of their Roman overlords and a complete restoration of the Kingdom of Israel. They want the Promised Land back. They want their inheritance restored. They want God's promise realized again.

But in a response similar to what God said to Moses, Jesus says to them: *It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth* (v. 7-8). It's a polite way of saying, "No, now get back to work!" The Promised Land they desired, the Kingdom of God they imagined, would not happen just yet. From the lofty summit of their hopes and dreams, the disciples are told, "You will not see the Kingdom."

Then, having adjusted the disciples' expectations, Jesus rises up to heaven. As they stand gawking after him, the disciples are joined by two men "dressed in white" – angels – who ask them, "Why do you stand here looking into the sky?" They want to know: why are you standing here idle when there is work to be done? They say: stop looking to what might someday be, and get to work here and now.

Now let me give you one more thing to consider: when the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come, he replied: *The coming of the Kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed, nor will they say, 'Here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you* (Luke 17:21). Another way to translate that is to say that the Kingdom of God is "within you." The Greek is very clear: this is already happening, it is already becoming a reality. The point is that in Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God is already come, it is here, now, among us, and more importantly, already within us.

Moses labored forty years for the promise of a Land he would never reach. The disciples labored for a Kingdom they would never see. The Pharisees labored in vain, not realizing that the Kingdom of God was already here, among them, within them. The fact is, we – as modern day disciples – work for a Kingdom that is already come, but not yet realized.

Our ancestors in the faith, the faithful men and women who built this church, preached God's Word, and labored for God's Kingdom before us, did so, knowing they would not reach the Promised Land or see the Kingdom of God realized in their lifetimes. But rather than looking up and wishing for something better, they rolled up their sleeves and got to work, doing Kingdom things right here in Fergus Falls. They claimed the Kingdom promises that live among all disciples: grace, hope, love, justice, and peace because of Jesus Christ.

Building on their legacy, we continue to do Kingdom things in our own day. We don't know when Jesus will come again to complete the Kingdom of God, but we do know it's already

begun: through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are witnesses to the wondrous and mighty acts of God in Jesus Christ. And we will do our part, even if we don't reach the Promised Land or see the Kingdom of God completed in our lifetime.

From the summit of Mount Everest, Edmund Hillary saw the world stretched out at his feet. From the summit of Mount Nebo, Moses saw the Promised Land. From the summit of resurrection joy, the disciples saw the possibilities of a world transformed. From our view on Summit Avenue, we see the Kingdom of God among us and within us, working for the benefit of this community. The view from Summit Avenue is a hope-filled vision of a Kingdom being realized. It is not yet complete, but it is a good work in progress. And the part we play in achieving God's Kingdom matters. With hearts, minds and arms open to God and our neighbor, we will move confidently into God's future.

What exactly does that mean for Federated Church?

It means that in 2017 we will:

- Worship God with our whole heart and mind and soul and strength;
- Feed the hungry and shelter the homeless;
- Serve the physically and mentally ill through our pastoral care ministries;
- Fight for the underdog and speak for the voiceless;
- Impart to our youth the morals and values that are missing in our culture;
- Provide biblically-based educational and multigenerational events;
- Share the good news of Christ's gospel of peace and justice, mercy and love;
- Assess our building and make it more accessible to the community;

To accomplish all this we anticipate some staffing changes and there will be some new ministries added. We will need everyone to do their part, recognizing that the kingdom goals are already within us and the power of the Holy Spirit is already among us. We work for a kingdom not yet fully realized, but already begun. And the view from Summit is bright with possibility.

Prayer: Holy One, you have promised to be with us, and long ago sent your Spirit to abide among us and guide us to a future of goodness and hope. We come seeking your truth, your justice, your kindness. O God, you are with us this morning. Let us feel your presence and welcome you into our lives. Come and fill these desires of our hearts. Amen

The View From Summit

Annual Meeting Sunday, January 22, 2017

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Deuteronomy 34:1-4 and Luke 17:20-21

On May 29, 1953 Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay reached the summit of Mount Everest, making them the first human beings to top the world's tallest mountain. Hillary was already an accomplished climber, but this particular climb made him famous the world over. He wrote about his life experiences in an autobiography entitled, "The View From the Summit." Of this particular accomplishment, Hillary wrote: "I think my first thought on reaching the summit – of course, I was very, very pleased to be there, naturally – but my first thought was one of a little bit of surprise. I was a little surprised that here I was, Ed Hillary, on top of Mt. Everest. After all, this is the ambition of most mountaineers." I bet Hillary was surprised! Imagine the view from 29,029 feet up, looking down upon the whole world. Hillary and Norgay were the first two men to see this view from the summit.

In Deuteronomy 34, Moses has a similar experience, although at a much lower elevation. Moses climbs Mount Nebo (2,680 feet) and *There the LORD showed him the whole land – from Gilead to Dan, all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea, the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar* (v. 1-3). In other words, the expansive view from the summit of Mount Nebo meant that Moses could see a very, very long way.

And God says to Moses, *This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.'* Everything that Moses sees from the summit of Mount Nebo, God pledges to the people of Israel. This is the Promised Land. The people of Israel labored 40 years to reach this land, enduring the desert sands, the scorching heat, the freezing cold, the snakes and the creepy crawlers of the wilderness: but they'd made it! Finally, the Promised Land sat in their sights. From the summit of Mount Nebo, the land of milk and honey lay at their feet.

But there was a problem: the Promised Land was also the Land of Canaan, where the Canaanites already lived, and they did not like this horde of nomadic Israelites descending on them like a plague of locusts. God's people fought for every inch of promised ground.