

**An (Un)Obstructed View Deuteronomy 34:1-14 Oct 25 2020**  
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“Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the LORD showed him the whole land... all the land of Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea, <sup>3</sup> ...”

To Abraham and Sarah God promised a land. A promised land for God’s chosen people. It took a while to get there. Abraham and Sarah’s grand and great grandchildren went into Egypt to escape famine. Then after generations Moses led them out. Then there was 40 years of desert wandering. Now in Moses` 120<sup>th</sup> year, the Promised Land is in sight.

Moses stands atop Mt Nebo in what is now the Kingdom of Jordan and from that height he sees the land that his people will enter without him.

Having led his people out from Egypt, Moses sees the future for his people. He sees the Promised Land.

When our congregation`s Pilgrimage group went to the Holy Land a few years ago we went to the top of Mt Nebo in the Jordanian desert and we did not see the promised Land. Well, we saw a bit of it.

We were there in May and our guide told us that we were there in what they called the *40 days of dust*. In the spring each year winds from the east carried sand into the Holy Land... Jordan, Israel, Lebanon... Sands from the Thar Desert of India, from the great deserts of the Saudi peninsula, sand from the Persian Gulf states, dust from these places was carried into the atmosphere and it created a haze that hung over the land.

Moses could see the Land of Promise from Nebo to the Mediterranean Sea. When we were on Mt Nebo we could see the Jordan valley below us and then things got hazy.

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There was an article in the New York Times this spring, a few months into the pandemic, entitled “No one knows what’s going to happen. “ The writers were referring to the pandemic. When will it end? No one knows. What will be the implications for society when it is finally over? No one knows. Will we all keep working from home? Will we still meet online often? Will the economic landscape shift permanently? No one knows. We make educated guesses about the pandemic and its aftermath, but really when it comes to the future, no one knows

I saw a computer projection for the 2<sup>nd</sup> pandemic wave we are now in on a CBC website... what will this 2nd wave be like? How high will it go? How long will it last? The colored graph the computer created had colored lines that went up and down as it showed the possibilities but there are many models and many variables so really how long will this wave last? No one knows.

A computer image bearing polling maps for the US election described the most recent data, national and state by state, in the race to be the American President. And in the middle of the graphs was a directive suggesting that we not check the graphs too often; the data is the same as it was 7 minutes ago...Americans and Canadians too are wondering what will happen as Americans go to the polls. Even some of us north of the Border are anxious about it. What will happen? In spite of much data and polling no one knows....

And all that not knowing is a strain. We may be anxious, No one knows and we want to know and it's hard not knowing what will happen...

When Moses went to the top of Mt Nebo he knew. He saw. He looked into the future for his people. He saw the Promised Land. A great gift.

As we look into the future, it's more like our church group's trip to Nebo's summit. It's hazy. Our view is obstructed. Our image of the future is far from clear.

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It's hard not knowing what lies ahead. We human beings like to look forward

We look forward to *what* will be, we look forward to events and celebrations and holidays and milestones ... So not knowing what the future holds, not being able to plan forward with any certainty, not knowing what things will be like even weeks from today, that is hard.

It's also true that even in a world without a pandemic, when it comes to the future, at least in the big picture, it's pretty hazy. What does the future hold? No one knows. We guess. We speculate. We imagine...But really, no one knows.

I recall, 4 years ago, sitting in a Presbytery meeting looking at my phone and feeling shock and dread as Trump was winning the 2016 election in US. Who knew that would happen?

Or those of us of a certain generation will recall South Africa moving to black majority rule; apartheid falling without violence. Or the Eastern bloc crumbling and the Berlin Wall coming down. Who predicted these things would unfold as they did?

We plan for the future, we imagine how things will be, we gather data and make projections but life is full of surprises, some difficult, some welcome, some global, some personal...

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The story of Moses on Mt Nebo is the end of the Book of Deuteronomy, the last chapter. There we read how Moses is given the gift of seeing into the future. He sees the Land of Promise that his people will soon enter. But the clarity is just for a moment. Before going to the summit of Nebo, Moses and the people of Israel wander in the wilderness. When will they get to the Holy Land? What will the Land of promise be like? They did not know. For 40 years, they could not see and they did not know.

And how did they live in that time of not knowing?

Deuteronomy is structured as a series of sermons from Moses to his people, advice for moving into the unknown future without him as their leader. And from the 33 chapters before today's reading I would pull out two things Moses speaks about to help when the future is unclear, which it is much of the time.

First there is a call to remember. Remember how God has cared for you in the past, remember God's faithfulness and steadfast love. For Israel, they were to remember God leading them out from slavery in Pharaoh's land. We can recall God's faithfulness to Israel, in Jesus, in our lives. In Ignatian spirituality there is something called a life review. You pray and review your life, stage by stage, decade by decade and with God's help you remember where God was active in your life. It's amazing what you can remember if you give yourself the time.

One day we will be remembering the pandemic of 2020 and how we got through it. One day our present endurance will be a story we draw strength from...

Another Deuteronomic tool for living with uncertain future is gratitude in the present moment. Can we sink into the present moment and know the gifts that are ours here and now? What will be? No one knows...

...but what do we know in the here and now? Where is God in the present moment? Where do we find comfort or blessing or peace or hope now? And then might we stay in the place where those gifts are found, rest with those gifts in the present moment for a time when you can...

When people come to the end of their lives, one of the things they often wonder about is the future. How will the human story end? What will happen in the grand narrative of human history? We naturally long to see how the story unfolds, to get a glimpse of the future of it all.

What does the future hold? No one knows. But who holds the future? As people of faith, this we know.

In Dante's poem *Paradiso* the poet imagines heaven. To reduce a very complex poem into an overly simple image, for Dante heaven is like a big stadium or concert hall and everyone there has a great seat, a direct view of the Holy that gives peace and joy. And once you are there you never want leave or look away...

Being a Christian of his time Dante also envisions heaven's concert hall having a few obstructed seats. If you don't quite get into heaven, there is purgatory where your view is diminished and you long for a better seat and a clearer view.

In time for everyone, the view becomes clear and God is seen, in all of God's goodness, grace and glory. In the end, like for Moses, the haziness parts and there is an unobstructed view.