

## **“Pivotal Points”**

**Rev. Brian Henderson · October 23, 2011**

Text: Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Anne did a masterful job of preaching last Sunday and I so appreciated her description of Egyptian culture as a very visual one. And further, her description of Moses couldn't have been any better. In some ways, Moses was god-like...after all he is depicted as seemingly performing miracle after miracle for the people of Israel.

It is jarring, however, to get to the end of Deuteronomy only to find that Moses' life ends without much fanfare. (And for goodness' sake...his grave even gets lost!) And isn't it a bit peculiar that the end of Deuteronomy—the end of the Pentateuch—that the end ends with the hero's death and with the reality that the hero of the Israelites—Moses—doesn't even get to cross over into the Promised Land...that place to which he had been leading the Israelites for decades.

But ohhh to be Moses. Did you catch some of the detailed description of him? He was one hundred and twenty years old when he died...his eyesight was unimpaired and his vigor had not abated.

I'm not even forty and my eyesight isn't great...and I don't know how much vigor I've got...except when I have a good cup of caffeinated coffee...

You see...this is a text that tells the story of a pivotal point in Israel's history. The way Deuteronomy ends makes readers like us ask the question...how will our story continue? What will we do? Will we move into the new land ahead of us or not?

I must say...without making any of you too uncomfortable...for me...Deuteronomy 34 presents proof that everything in the Bible can not be read literally...literally.

When we read of Moses standing on Mt. Nebo and when we read about him looking out on all the landmarks before him...Gilead, Dan, Naphtali, Ephraim, Manasseh, Judah, the western sea, the Negeb, the Plain or Valley of Jericho, and Zoar...

In truth...when someone stands on Mt. Nebo...which several of us did earlier this year...you can not see all of the places Deuteronomy 34 says that Moses saw. The geography of the land is such that you literally can not see half of these places.

So this text makes us think on a number of levels...foremost this text challenges us I believe to stand on our own mountain and to view with courage the possibilities before us...

The death of Moses and the transition of leadership to Joshua and the Israelites walking into a new land...into the Promised Land...this *was* a pivotal point for these faith-filled people in antiquity.

As WE walk into another season of Stewardship emphasis here at Calvary...I'd like to suggest that we are at a pivotal point in our congregation's 130 years of history.

As we stand on our mountain and look back upon the history that is behind us...this history is rich and complete with great achievements and transitions and pivotal points that when they took place...some of them were filled with great energy and enthusiasm...and some of them were filled with great angst and concern. And yet...Calvary has survived.

And to be truthful...as we look ahead to the history in front of us...I believe we're looking at a history like our past that will be complete with great achievements and transitions and pivotal points...some of these will give us great energy and enthusiasm...and some of these will give us angst and concern.

But if we want Calvary to thrive...I believe there are challenges with which we must come to grips...

If you'll allow me a few moments...I'd like to share with you some of what's been on my heart for our church family...I ask you to trust with me in the power of God's spirit...and in your Senior Pastor's ability to not lead us astray...

Now you're all wondering... "My goodness...what is Brian going to say..."

This past week...our oldest...Ana...said to me and Tara, “You know...I don’t understand money. All we do is take money and give it to others and they take our money and give it to others. We just keep passing money around.”

Quite an observation. Tara and I were impressed.

And so I replied... “You’re right Ana...it’s just that some people eventually figure out how to hold on to the money they get and keep it from the rest of us!”

And there are plenty of good reasons to hold on to money...but if you’ve got some you’re holding on to and can help Calvary more...please...don’t hesitate to share. 😊

Calvary needs your financial support. One hundred percent of our budget is covered by the pledges, tithes and gifts you (we) give.

It was very encouraging that in response to the recent strategic plan survey to which many of you responded, eighty percent of you indicated that you could increase your giving by at least two percent. Thank you.

This reminds me that *together we can do more*. While we encourage everyone to tithe...to give ten percent of your income to Calvary’s ministry I know that this isn’t a reality for everyone.

So...I ask you...will you think hard about what you can give and/or pledge to Calvary in the coming year? Many of the ideas that have been generated through our strategic plan process so far...ideas about worship space and styles and programming for older adults and for young adults...opportunities for our children and youth...all will take staff *and* volunteer time *and* financial support.

I believe in what Calvary is...in who Calvary is...and that Calvary has so much to offer our community. Tara and I give ten percent of our gross income to support ministry and mission here. This isn't always easy for us but we are committed to wanting the best for our church community.

At the risk of sounding too pointed...I challenge all of you to give the best pledge this year you can give for the ministry and mission that happens through this place.

Calvary is a unique community that offers hope and support to individuals and families at all different stages and places of life. The stories that many of you tell about how Calvary is so meaningful to you...these stories are truly that...they're meaningful and they remind me that great ministry happens through you...through this church.

Calvary...you're changing lives. Do we get everything right all the time? No. But this ought not keep us from doing what we can to make the work that happens here be the best it can be.

As we stand on the mountain of today and look ahead to what is before us...as we stand in this stewardship season...I'd like to challenge us to be the BEST stewards we can be...for in truth...the future strengths and abilities of our congregation depend upon what you and I are courageously willing and able to do here in the present.

I challenge us today to give financially...and you don't need to wait until next year to begin.

And at the risk of sounding like a Senior Pastor who is called to challenge her or his congregation to new places of faith and ministry...

I challenge us today as members of Calvary to be open to different and new ways of thinking...we need to be open to change and ongoing transition...we need to delete from our vocabulary, "We've never done it that way before..." or "Why don't we do things the way we used to?" or "Unless you read the Bible the way I do..."

We need to remember that the future vitality of the church doesn't revolve **completely** around what you and I think...but that it also revolves around what others think and see as important...

When a congregation thinks more about itself and its own concerns...and not the concerns of others and the larger community of which it is part...it doesn't last long...maybe a handful of decades.

We need to open more widely the doors of our adult Sunday school classes so that we're more intentionally welcoming of those who are visiting and seeking a class of which to be part...we need to be looking for folk to invite to our classes out in the Narthex and Fellowship Hall...we need to be looking for folk before they get to the doors of our classrooms...we need to intentionally welcome them like we welcome those of us who've been around for years.

I believe we need to reclaim the word and practice of evangelism...but not in a Bible-thumping, Romans' Road kind of a way...but quite simply...evangelism is telling good news. And Calvary...we've got good news to tell.

We've got the story of Jesus to proclaim. And contrary to what some may think...the good news of Jesus is for everyone—this good news gives us hope and purpose—and it transforms us...it causes us to think about people and life differently. That's what Jesus did—he caused folk to think about people and life differently.

The good news of Jesus still does today what it did two thousand years ago...it challenges us to welcome...to embrace...to affirm folk for who they are...

If we allow ourselves the space to share this kind of evangelism...there is something of the gospel—something of God's good news—for all of us to experience—whether or not we see eye-to-eye biblically or theologically or socially or even politically.

Calvary...I believe we have the opportunity to experience a level of ministry that has the capacity to shape us and mold us into being *a Christ-like community that experiences and shares God's love* in very transformative ways.

6500 East Girard Avenue sits on the intersection of more than just Hampden and Monaco...we are sitting near the intersection of people's lives who are waiting for a word of encouragement...of prayer...of support...of affirmation...there are moms, dads, sons, daughters, older folk and 20-something and 30-something folk...there are single folk and married folk...there are self-assured folk and hurting folk...hungry and homeless folk...sophisticated and successful folk... needing God's good news...

In truth...it takes courage for all of us...it takes trust for all of us...it takes tenderness for all of us...it takes giving some things up for all of us...to do together what none of us can do on our own.

As we stand on the mountain of today and look ahead to what is before us...I challenge us to be the BEST stewards we can be...*for in truth*...the future strengths and abilities of our congregation depend upon what you and I are courageously willing and able to do here in the present. Amen.