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Holy Faith, Santa Fe
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Proper 25 – Year A
Deuteronomy 34.1-12
Psalm 1
1 Thessalonians 2.1-8
Matthew 22.34-46

In the name of the one, true, and living God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“So close, yet so far.” How many times have you said “so close, yet so far” in describing events in your life? Many times we say it when we miss our goal or objective by just a smidge, or sometimes we say it in jest when we miss our goal or objective by a mile! So close, yet so far! We didn’t make the team that we tried out for. We didn’t get the role in the play we hoped for. We didn’t get the promotion we thought we deserved. We didn’t get the love in return that we expected.

So close, yet so far. It’s often a wistful expression to mask our disappointment. Disappointment with the situation. Disappointment with others. Disappointment with ourselves. How do you handle disappointment? Do you shrug it off? Do you resolve to do better next time? Do you get angry and let your anger fester?

Think of your greatest disappointment, and I’ll almost guarantee that it’s not as great as the disappointment that Moses experienced! Today’s story from Deuteronomy is Moses’ story of disappointment. In fact, it could be subtitled, “So close, yet so far!” After wandering in the desert for forty years toward the Promised Land, God leads Moses and the Israelites almost to the Jordan River. God takes Moses up to the top of a mountain and shows him all the land stretching northward and westward, the land that God has sworn to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their descendants forever. And then God tells Moses that he can see it, but he won’t cross over into it. The prize, the goal, the objective that Moses has spent most of his adult life pursuing is just out of

his grasp. He can see it, but he can't reach it. He can view it, but he can't realize it. So close, yet so far!

Think of how Moses must have felt! But God had reasons. That was God's punishment of the Israelites for making an idol in the form of a golden calf and worshipping that instead of the one, true, and living God; and God's punishment of Moses for not trusting God sufficiently that God would provide for the people and give Moses what he needed to lead. That's why God caused Moses and the Israelites to wander in the desert for forty years, so that generation that had been at Mount Sinai and had broken the first of the Ten Commandments before Moses had even come down from the mountain with the commandments etched in stone would die off and never reach the Promised Land.

But remember Moses never asked for the job. He was minding his own business, watching the flock of his father-in-law. God chose Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. God gave Moses power to cause plagues to rain down upon the Egyptians to force Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. God parted the waters of the Red Sea so the Israelites could escape and Moses' leadership would be unquestioned by the people. God provided the people manna from heaven to stop the people's grumbling against Moses. God allowed Moses to meet God on Mount Sinai and receive the covenant of the Ten Commandments on behalf of the people. And now after wandering for forty years, Moses is allowed to see the Promised Land, but is told that he will not enter it. Think of how disappointed Moses must have felt!

But when we think of Moses, what do we think of? Do we remember Moses' disappointment? Do we remember Moses as a failure? No! Deuteronomy tells us that

“[n]ever since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.” We remember Moses as the great deliverer of God’s people. We remember Moses as the great lawgiver – the one who gave us the Ten Commandments that form the foundation of our society’s jurisprudence from the Judeo-Christian tradition. And if you find it hard to remember all ten commandments, let alone to do all ten, have no worries! In today’s Gospel Jesus summarizes the law into just two. The first four commandments focus on our relationship toward God, and the last six focus on our relationship with one another. So when Jesus is asked which is the greatest commandment, he answers, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” This Summary of the Law contained in our Prayer Book, and that we hear at the beginning of each Rite I Eucharist, comes directly from the Bible. Yes, Moses is remembered for his legacy to us of the law, not for disappointment and not for failure.

God has a way of taking our disappointment and perceived failure and turning them around for God’s purposes and our good. After Moses died, God raised up Joshua to lead God’s people into the Promised Land and gave Joshua the power to defeat the other nations occupying the land and to carry on the vision. Remember, too, that the disciples who witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus thought that Jesus’ teaching and ministry had resulted in disappointment and failure, only to be surprised three days later that Jesus’ death opened up the way to eternal life which we continue to celebrate today through the hope of the Resurrection.

God uses God's transformative power to take common things and make them holy, to take disappointment and perceived failure and to transform them into hope and renewal. God takes ordinary water and changes it into the water of Baptism. By the transformative power of the water at our baptism, we are buried with Christ in his death. By the transformative power of the water of Baptism, we share in Jesus' resurrection. By the transformative power of the water of Baptism, we are reborn by the Holy Spirit for God's purposes and our good. God takes ordinary bread and wine and changes them into the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that we may dwell in him and he in us. God uses the perceived failure of Jesus' death to open the way to us of new and never-ending life.

Moses' story is our story. Jesus' story is our story. Remember that the next time you experience disappointment and perceived failure. Remember that next time you think, "so close, yet so far." Amen.