

WGUMC October 26, 2014 Moses and the Mission
Deuteronomy 34:1-12

I don't know about you, but I've been bombarded by political ads in the last several weeks. And I don't even have TV! It's that time again. O, we are always looking for a leader, but every two years they come looking for us. God help us!

It was simpler (and cheaper) back when God just appointed our leaders, because God has a way of choosing winners. Last week we celebrated the 100th birthday of one of the winners. Ruby Goodnight has been a lay leader in this congregation and for us a "spiritual redwood" because she has lived long and grown tall in the grace of God.

This week in the Bible, we read about another spiritual redwood. Moses lived even longer and grew taller. In fact, he towered over all the other Hebrew prophets. Consider his accomplishments. He went down to Egypt; he confronted Pharaoh; he freed the slaves by parting the Red Sea. What's more, he didn't kill them when they later complained; he spoke

with God face to face; he received the ten commandments and led the people through the wilderness.

Moses was tested in the wilderness not for 40 days but for 40 years. Yet in the end, God did not let him lead the people into the Promised Land. It was time for new management. Moses had been the right leader for the Exodus, but a new leader was needed for the Conquest.

But who could replace Moses? After all, as our text says, there "never since has arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses" and "he was unequalled for all the signs and wonders...for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power" that he performed. [Deut 34:10-11] And that's the problem, isn't it?

Passing the mantle of leadership has always been a problem for prophets and apostles, Messiahs and missionaries and regular folk like us. "Who can replace Moses?" is a question that gets repeated in every generation and in every congregation.

This church is 145 years old or 140 or 105, depending on where you start counting. It began as a Sunday School in the 1860's. Willow Glen got its first Methodist pastor in 1874. But for the next three decades, the Methodists ran hot and cold. The Sunday School would start and stop and for years there was no leadership at all. Then, finally, a congregation was formally organized in 1909.

Since then, the church has had some great leaders: Rev. Ezelle Cox, who was the last pastor of the church on Lincoln Avenue and built this church on the corner of Minnesota and Washington; Wayne Williams who led the effort to buy the Woodhaven property and start the preschool. But it wasn't just the pastors. There were some great lay leaders, too. Their names are still spoken in hushed tones: Crummy, Anderson, Compton, Reinschmidt, Goodnight, Praisewater, Ritchie, Buell, Fissel, Schlosser, Hosack, Mauser, Bois, McIntosh, Mounts. I could go on.

But I won't, because too often we start to think about these saints the same way we think about Moses. We think that we could never be like them. We could never do what they did. We could never give what they gave. We say, times have changed. This valley has changed. The workweek is longer. The cost of living is higher. Moms are busier. The load is heavier. And we know that it will never be like it was in those days.

And that is true. It is also completely irrelevant. Because God doesn't need Moses today. It's a different time and we have a different challenge. So we need different leadership. Who can replace Moses? By the grace of God, *WE* can.

In fact, there are people in this church—I'm looking at some of them—who don't know they are leaders yet. Maybe they think they are too young or too busy or don't know enough Bible. "I'm not a Moses," they'll tell me. And I'll say, "Good, because God doesn't need Moses. God needs you." So every time you start to worry that you're not enough, that you

can't do it or that you don't have it, remember what Rabbi Susya said toward the end of his life: "God will not ask me why I was not Moses. God will ask me why I was not Susya." [story told by Martin Buber]

God needs you to be you. So maybe you can't part the Red Sea, but you can read a spreadsheet. God needs you. Maybe you don't have Moses' direct line to God, but you know how to keep the church in line and online. God needs you. Maybe you can't bring down a plague of locusts, but you can teach toddlers or lead a small group of teenagers. God needs you. Maybe you won't ever see God face to face, but you know how to talk to people heart to heart. God needs you.

We are not Moses, but we have a mission. It is simple: "We are God's family growing through caring, sharing and serving," and we will continue to do so until Willow Glen starts to look like the Promised Land. This church has been on a mission to get there for 140 years. So don't give up now. And

don't tell me that you can't recruit volunteers like Ruby Goodnight or greet newcomers like Grace Praisewater or do things the same way they used to be done. That's OK. You are you, and you are enough. Today is a new day. Together, we'll figure out a new way.

To help us chart the way, I invite our Moses for the Day, Dave Freeman, to give us an update on our Mission Possible campaign.