

The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
Bruton Parish Church  
The Rev<sup>d</sup> Christopher L. Epperson  
Sunday, October 23, 2011

Most seminarians take an exam in their final year of theological education, intended to measure the general academic position of the candidate. This exam is administered to students all across the country and is scored by a board of examining chaplains. There hasn't always been such uniformity. In the past, each diocese administered its own set of canonical exams and the diocese scored the results. Since each diocese did its own thing, content and method could vary.

In the Diocese of Tennessee, when Tennessee was just one diocese, the bishop at the time often gave parts of the exam verbally. The bishop felt through conversation, one could plumb the real depths of a student's knowledge. The story goes that he was verbally quizzing a student about Moses. This was during a time when Biblical criticism was expanding a great deal. Lots of new questions, theories and methodologies were in play.

The student gave a very detailed and complete response to the bishop. The student walked the bishop through the story of Moses' birth, adoption into the house of Pharaoh, and call by God to lead Israel out of Egypt into the Promised Land. The student addressed the time Israel spent wandering in the wilderness, hungry and thirsty, sustained by manna and water from the rock. The student covered carefully the reception of the Law and God's covenant with God's people with Moses as the intermediary. The student covered it all brilliantly, and being very proud of his education and care, the student finished his response by saying that his response was offered assuming that Moses was a historical figure, a real person, not a literary device. The bishop made a few notes and smiled at the student. The bishop rose from a chair placed a hand on the shoulder of the student and said, "I assure you, Moses is a historical figure in the Diocese of Tennessee."

Having just recounted much of the Moses story, it is not too much of a stretch to see Moses as a human being. The story, you know it, is replete with human stuff, like doubt, fear and apparent failure. I think the most human piece of the Moses story happened in the text from Deuteronomy. Moses died. Moses came to the mountain saw the destination and died. Moses died just like we will all die. Moses exits the stage, his time complete and the story of God's love and calling human beings into relationship and service continues. Moses is done, but the mission continues.

Moses is gone, but look what was accomplished through his efforts. The ground work is laid. A model for faithfulness is brought into being and with time, God will use Israel to graft gentiles into a saving relationship with God, the God of Israel, the God and Father of Jesus Christ. What matters is Moses' faithfulness in his time.

What are we called to do, while we are here, with what we have? Are we building up as we walk through the wilderness of life? As individuals and a community of Christ, are we seeking to be God's people when and where we can?

The Good news: Faithfulness is nothing more than that, responding to God's grace and gifts, as our finite human selves, in the heart of our story, as part of God's story. We have gifts, and we have the time we have. We are called to use them in love of God and neighbor.