

LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS PROPER 25A  
Twenty-first Sunday After Pentecost – October 25, 2020  
The Rt. Rev. Susan B. Haynes

**Deuteronomy 34:1-12**

**Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17**

**1 Thessalonians 2:1-8**

**Matthew 22:34-46**

**Deuteronomy 34:1-12**

The Israelites have not yet reached their destination, but they are close. For Moses, however, his life has reached the end point. He has faithfully led the people, and although he himself will not reach their intended goal, he will at least get a glimpse of it from a distance. Moses is an unparalleled prophet. He is distinguished as one whom God knew face to face (Exodus 33:11); and yet He is not exempt from obedience to God. In Numbers 20:2-13, we are told the story of when Moses disobeyed God and took matters into his own hands. God had commanded Moses, in response to the thirst of the Israelites, to speak to the rock and command it to produce water. Instead Moses struck the rock with his staff (as he did in Exodus 17:1). This had worked for him once before so he saw no reason, I suppose, not to try it again. The Lord was angry, however, that Moses did not listen to him and do as he commanded, which was to speak to the rock instead of striking it. The consequence was that Moses would not get to see the Promised Land. This is a little harsh, we think; and we wonder about a God who would punish so severely and seemingly capriciously. While many Rabbinic scholars have interpreted this “punishment” differently, two things are clear: 1) those who would do what God commands should listen carefully and not insert their own will and pride into the picture, and 2) sometimes, when we do things the way we’ve always done them, even if that way has worked, we might miss a better way to reach the goal.

***Intimate relationship with God is foundational to doing God’s will. It is tempting to want to take matters into our own hands and quit listening to God. It is tempting to want to hold on to the way we’ve always done things and thereby miss reaching the “Promised Land.” To what are you clinging? What old ways of doing things do you hold on to which might be preventing you from seeing a new way of achieving what you want? Do you sometimes have a sneaking suspicion that you know better than God about how to do things? How can you deepen your relationship with God, so that you know him “face to face” and can clearly hear His voice and direction for your life?***

**Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17**

God is our refuge. What a powerful statement. In Him we are grounded. In Him we are oriented back to that from which we came. “Go back, O child of earth.” We belong to the earth and from it we are formed. This means we are mortal and our limited time on earth is but an infinitesimal fraction of that which encompasses God. For God a thousand years are like a watch in the night. We fade away suddenly, but God remains. For some our mortality might be a frightening idea, but if we understand that we are sheltered in God, then this is good news. In the shelter of the Almighty, we can be joyful. We

can be productive and pray for God to prosper our productivity. Being sheltered in God is to be grounded, humble, joyful and productive.

***What activity of yours on Earth would you like God to bless? In what handiwork do you engage that you desire God to prosper? Perhaps you are an artisan. A businessman, A Scholar. A teacher. A parent. A spouse. A member of the Church. If you are sheltered in God, then all you do can be lifted to Him for the mark of His prospering. What is then left for you to do is the work God gives you to do and to be joyful!***

### **1 Thessalonians 2:1-8**

When our message is combined with courage and compassion, it is valid. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to continue to declare the gospel courageously, even in the face of compassion. Whenever we speak, we should speak the truth, with the goal being to please God, not mortals. In this manner, God is constantly testing the heart. With the proclamation of truth, our hearts become strong and grounded in God. Paul ends with the tender reminder that our relationships with one another should be gentle...as a nurse cares for her own children...putting their welfare always first.

***How easy or difficult is it for you to speak the truth? How easy or difficult is it to put aside what others might think of you if you live your life and speak your words in such a way that God's truth is proclaimed? Does it become easier to speak/live the truth if we put the welfare of others in as prominent a place as we put the welfare of ourselves or our children – like a nurse caring for her own children?***

### **Matthew 22:34-46**

Jesus has silenced the Sadducees. Those who would test him have already asked him about the Resurrection and about paying taxes. His orthodox knowledge and explanation of Scripture have astounded and silenced them. And now the Pharisees come and make one more attempt to trap him. Their trap is in the form of a lawyer coming to ask him a question that has either hundreds of answers or no answer at all. No matter what he says, they think, he will be backed into a corner. Which commandment is the greatest? Of all the 613 Levitical commandments which is the most important? This is not a casual conversation. The Greek implies that this is a hostile test. There's a lot at stake here for Jesus. He responds by quoting the foundational words of all Jewish worship and life – the Shema. These are the words that every Jewish person recites day and night to begin and end the day: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." No orthodox Jew could dispute this as an ultimate commandment. Then Jesus takes the discussion one step further by adding an addendum: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus is not saying that one loves God by loving one's neighbor, but he is connecting the two loves. If one loves God, one certainly is enabled and should love neighbor. The aim of Jesus's summary of this law is to enable a person to orient his or her entire life to God. Jesus then initiates a question of his own regarding the identity of the Messiah. Most orthodox Jews would immediately assert that the Messiah is David's son, but then Jesus quotes the first verse of Psalm 110: "The Lord said to my Lord..." If David himself will call the Messiah Lord, then the Messiah cannot be his son. He cannot be both superior and subordinate. The question is enough to silence the Jews. These two sections of the gospel – the question

about the greatest commandment and the question about the identity of the Messiah proclaim both Jesus's mission and his identity.

***How has your relationship with Jesus enabled you to love others? Is it possible to love others without loving God? Is it possible to love God without loving others? And is it possible to love either without loving yourself? How do your actions in your life in the world today reflect your love of God, others and self?***

**COLLECT:**

***Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God for ever and ever. Amen.***