

Honoring Imperfection

Rise and Shine – September 9th

Deuteronomy 34:10-12

Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. He was unequaled for all the signs and wonders that the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel. (For context, read 34:5-12.)

Here we are told that there was no prophet like Moses, that he was unequaled. Yet the biblical account doesn't gloss over his faults: He had murdered an Egyptian (Exodus 2:11-15), and he disobeyed God's command by striking the rock instead of speaking to it in the wilderness, which God said indicated that Moses didn't trust him (Numbers 20:7-12).

Question: How does the fact that God used Moses in spite of his imperfections affect how you think about your own flaws and potential usefulness to God?

In the News

Nation Mourns American Hero John McCain

Surrounded by his family, Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), war hero and political maverick, died at his Arizona home last Saturday, a day after his family announced he was discontinuing treatment for brain cancer.

Tributes from across the nation and the globe are flowing in for the senator who, prior to his death, requested that Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, who defeated him in his two presidential campaigns, deliver eulogies.

"I think it is John McCain imparting a lesson in civility by asking the two men who defeated him to speak, as an example to America that differences in political views and contests shouldn't be so important that we lose our common bonds and the civility that is, or used to be, a hallmark of American democracy," said longtime friend and senior adviser Steve Duprey.

McCain graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1958, following the path set by his father and grandfather, who were both four-star admirals. As a Navy pilot during the Vietnam War, he was shot down in 1967 while on a

bombing mission over Hanoi. He suffered multiple injuries; was captured, denied food and medical care, and tortured by the North Vietnamese.

When his captors learned that his father was a top-ranking naval officer, they suggested he could be released ahead of other prisoners who had been captured before him, but he refused the offer. By the time he was released in 1973, he was permanently disabled from his wounds.

He returned to his wife and three children, only to have his marriage collapse. He soon remarried and had other children. McCain later called the breakup of his first marriage his "greatest moral failure."

Beginning in 1982, McCain served two terms in the House of Representatives, and was then elected to the Senate, where he served more than 30 years until his death.

The Rev. Delonte Gholston, pastor of Peace Fellowship Church in Washington, D.C., wrote that McCain was "a man full of contradictions and complexity, but a man that seemed devoted to living with integrity. He made plenty of mistakes, but he owned them. And he tried to call this country to a higher way."

"I have lived an honorable life, and I am proud of my life," McCain said as the end drew near. "I have been tested on a number of occasions. I haven't always done the right thing."

Some missteps McCain identified included his early opposition to the creation of a federal holiday in honor of Martin Luther King Jr.; his involvement in a political influence scandal involving Arizona financier Charles Keating who had donated to his campaign in the 1980s; his failure to voice his real views about the Confederate flag during the 2000 South Carolina presidential primary; his yielding to pressure during the 2008 presidential campaign to choose Sarah Palin as his running mate; and his support for the Iraq War.

Lindsey Graham (R-SC) said this in an emotional tribute to his friend and colleague: "I do not cry for a perfect man. I cry for a man who had honor, and always was willing to admit to his imperfection. ... It's okay to tell people, 'I screwed up. I got this wrong. I want to make it right.' Honor is, in my view, doing the right thing at your own expense. And he did that time and time and time again." Graham said McCain told him, "'I have become better for my failures, because it teaches us ... and without my failures, I would have never been successful.' ... He failed a lot," Graham continued, "but he never quit."

McCain showed courage and an ability to work across the aisle even when it was not to his own benefit politically. He partnered with John Kerry (D-MA) to restore diplomatic relations with Vietnam, the nation that had imprisoned him in horrendous conditions, and with Russ Feingold (D-WI) to reform the way campaigns are financed; he opposed torture of suspected terrorists; he voted against his party's effort to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

During McCain's second presidential campaign, when one of his supporters called Obama an Arab, implying that the Democrat was not a natural-born, loyal American, McCain refuted her allegation. "No ma'am," McCain said, taking back the microphone. "He's a decent family man, a citizen that I just happen to have disagreements with on fundamental issues."

In his final letter to the nation, McCain voiced these sentiments: "I've tried to serve our country honorably. I've made mistakes but I hope my love for America will be weighed favorably against them. I've often observed that I am the luckiest person on earth. I feel that way even now, as I prepare for the end of my life. I've loved my life, all of it. I've had experiences, adventures, friendships, enough for 10 satisfying lives, and I am so thankful. Like most people, I have regrets. But I would not trade a day of my life in good or bad times for the best day of anybody else's."

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Psalm 15:1-5

O LORD, who may abide in your tent?

Who may dwell on your holy hill?

*Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right,
and speak the truth from their heart;*

who do not slander with their tongue,

and do no evil to their friends,

nor take up a reproach against their neighbors;

in whose eyes the wicked are despised,

but who honor those who fear the LORD;

who stand by their oath even to their hurt;

who do not lend money at interest,

and do not take a bribe against the innocent.

Those who do these things shall never be moved. (No context needed.)

The psalmist inquires who have the right to come near to the holy God. Not those who give the largest donations, nor those with the most education, nor those who are most "religious."

Rather, those who are welcome in the presence of God "do what is right," particularly with regard to how they treat people. They tell the truth "from their heart"; they don't slander others; they don't give honor to the wicked, but honor those who fear God; they keep their word even at their own expense; they don't hurt the weak, the vulnerable, the innocent, in order to gain an advantage for themselves.

Questions: How can a person "walk blamelessly" in the world? Is it really possible? How can we discern what is the right thing to do in every situation? When have you or someone you know "stood by your oath even to your hurt," and kept your word even at your own expense?

Prayer

We pray, O God, for the courage, strength of purpose, and power of your Spirit to act honorably in all circumstances, so our consciences may be clear before you. In Jesus' name. Amen.