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"Taking Up the Offering"
Sermon on Deuteronomy 34:1-12

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The music surrounds us, all around us, and lifts us up. It is an offering to the heavens. I don't know how an offering begins. Maybe it begins with a feeling deep in one's bones, "To whom much is given, much is expected." One just has to say, "Thank you, for this is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!" When is an offering conceived?

The music we heard began hundreds of years ago. Perhaps, on some "bonnie" day in the shade of the glen, a note or two was born. Or maybe the words came first; and someone searched for the notes to complement them.

Who knows. I know the tune stayed the same, but the words were changed. They came to the church not long ago, in the mail, wrapped in brown paper. Most recently, on Wednesday nights, the choir rehearsed. And then came the whistle, drum, strum, accordion, harp, choir. And then we, too, came together for this offering, this gift of God. And even after the tune ended, this gift, this offering is still being lifted up.

When do you take up the offering? We take up the offering all our lives.

Deuteronomy 34:1-12
Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the LORD showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the Negeb, and the Plain -- that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees -- as far as Zoar. The LORD said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there." Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command. He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired, and his vigor had not abated.

> The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended. Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him, and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the LORD had commanded Moses. 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.

Our lives are an offering. As Moses says to the people of God in Deuteronomy, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord your God is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Keep these words… … in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home, when you're away, when you lie down, and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem[b] on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

In other words, make it your life's offering to love your Lord God with all your heart, mind, and strength!

Moses proclaimed those words. And we just heard Jesus say, "It's the most important commandment…" and the other is just like it. Just like it. Just like it. Which means you can't tell them apart. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Those words deserve an uplifting tune! Something that lifts the spirit. Major key! Fast tempo. Something that lifts the spirit, soars.

A welcome change. There is so much that is melancholy. So much that sounds depressing. A volume so loud that it damages the ear. Saddens the heart of God.

Listen to the music you're making. Listen to what your life is offering. Do you need to make a change? There's always time to change our tune.

The word of God today offers us Moses. When did the offering of Moses begin? The Bible says it began when he was just a baby. He was born in a minor key. The world was all dark and nasty. Pharaoh afraid. He killed Hebrew babies. He killed babies.

I heard the hero's tears this week. Maybe you heard them, too. "I want to apologize for not saving babies… I couldn't save them all; I just wish I could have saved them all. That's the hardest thing for me right now." Such a sad song.

A baby was born. His momma placed him in a basket, and seasoned that basket with her tears. And placed the basket in the river with her baby. And hoped.

The cry was heard by the daughter of the Pharaoh of FEAR. The daughter opened the basket and saw the baby boy crying. And "she felt sorry for him." She knew the law about Hebrew babies. She knew her daddy! And yet, she knew the power of her own heart. The

image of God. Something of the image of God that beat inside of her. She drew him out of the water…and that became his name. Moses! Moses! One who is drawn out. Saved!

The offering of God: that Holy One should reach out to others and save them. The offering of God, that we, too, have the power to save! "I just wish I could have saved them all!" "It's ok, baby!" his momma said.

We, too, are "drawn out of the waters, the waters of our Baptism." Salvation. What is your tune? What are you offering to God? Your whole heart and mind and soul? The other offering just like it… exactly like it. That you should love your neighbor as yourself. Listen to what your life is offering. There's still time to change your tune.

Moses! Moses! Did you know that when he grew up, he killed a man? He killed a man. A bully of a man who was beating a Jewish slave. Something in Moses recognized that it was not right. Something in him that heard the cry. He had to do something! Killed him… buried his body in the sand and ran away. Just gave up his life in the palace and became a man on the run.

He took the job as shepherd. You spend a lot of time thinking when you're a shepherd. Nothing else to do. TikTok hadn't been invented yet. And when it was invented, people just TikTok. TikTok their life away. As an offering? There's still time to change your tune!

One boring day, there came a voice from a fiery shrub. A voice that said, "Moses, I need you. I am who I am, needs you. To take my people out of bondage into the land I shall give them. To draw them out… Moses!"

Moses received the call of God!

We have a call. YOU are to love your Lord with all your heart, mind, and soul, and the other just like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. And we are to offer our lives to that end. We can be kind or not. We can be grace-filled or not. We can be saviors or not. There's still time to change your tune!

Moses! Moses! What a story! Knocking on the door of the hard-hearted Pharaoh. Let my people go! The Passover. The Tower of fire by night! Cloud by day! Through the Red Sea, the cheers of the people! The complaints of the people!

"We're hungry!" "We're thirsty!" "It's too warm!" "It's too cold." "The coffee is terrible." "Pastor, you do know we're out of toilet paper in the bathroom." Sorry! I digress.

Moses! Moses! That intermediary between God and the people. He came down off the mountain, and his face shone like the sun. They had to make drapes to cover his face just to talk to him. We, too, should have drapery over our faces, for we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, and strength. It should be said, it should be told to our children, it should be that we talk about it when we rise and go to bed… it should be written on our faces. On our faces!

As Jacob said to his brother, Esau - the brother he tricked and cheated, the brother who realized that life isn't about the stuff - Esau, a big hairy man, hugged his little snake-skinned brother with all mercy, all love, all reconciliation, and said, "Seeing your face is like seeing the

face of God!" What an offering this reconciliation. What a crescendo of sound… what is your life offering?

Moses's life had this moment! Moses should have spoken to the rock. That's what God said. Speak to the rock, and water the people will have water. And Moses hit the rock with his staff. In the great scheme of things, I don't see the difference between talking to a rock and hitting it with a stick. I'm not a rock. But, to God, the difference kept Moses out of the Land of Promise. Ten seconds of his life kept him out of the Promised Land.

In life we make these little 10-second mistakes. Some of them we do without thinking. Some we do with some thinking. Either way, we carry them throughout our lives. Big mistakes and little mistakes. Things we should have said, and didn't. Things we should have never said, but did. They're on our resume. Moses carried the mistake all his life. It kept him out of the Promised Land. Ten seconds!

But I do love this ending. "Moses!" I can hear God saying, "Moses! I can see the hand of God reaching out… I see Moses lifting his hand to be drawn out and up… Nothing, then, crossing the line between wilderness and promise. Between mistake and grace. Just the two of them flying up the Jordan River, up the green mountains, the aroma of cedar, wings like eagles soaring over the land. Down the seashore… up the mountain and down to Jericho, just flying.

Moses stood, his eyes wet from wind and wonder. He took a breath. He took a breath… he took a breath… last breath…. Moses! Moses! My baby! When it was over, it is still with us. An offering of life and salvation… for we, too can play the tune! There's still time!

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