

I

The Boston Red Sox were one of the most dominant baseball teams of the early of 20th century. Between 1903 and 1918, the Red Sox won the World Series five times, including three in a span of four years from 1915 to 1918. But after the 1918 season, the Red Sox sold off many of their best players, including a young kid from Baltimore by the name of Babe Ruth.

After winning five World Series in 15 years, it would take the Red Sox another 28 years just to make it there. But they lost the seventh and deciding game of the 1946 World Series by just one run.

It would be another 21 years before the Red Sox returned to the World Series, but again, they lost the 1967 series in the seventh and deciding game.

The Red Sox returned in 1975, and thanks to a dramatic home run in extra innings of game six, they forced a seventh and deciding game. But once again, they lost game seven by just one run.

In 1986, the Red Sox returned, and after five games, they led the World Series three games to two. They took a two-run lead into the final inning of the sixth game, and they needed just one more out to record their first title since they sold Babe Ruth to the Yankees. They would not get that out, and they would go on to lose the series in seven games.

They would not have a chance at a World Series title until the next century.

II

Baseball, of course, is just a child's game, or, as some romantics have called

it, it's America's pastime. But in the grand scheme of things, baseball doesn't really matter. It's a form of entertainment, a distraction, something about which we can cheer and argue about, or ignore altogether. Even the most rabid baseball fan knows that there are far bigger and more important issues in life than who won or lost a game.

But to me, part of what makes baseball so interesting is that it's so often a metaphor for our human lives. And as every baseball fan knows, whether they follow the doings of the Atlanta Braves or the Boston Red Sox or the Savanna Bananas, if you play or follow baseball for any length of time, you will soon run into some disappointment.

And disappointment is yet another one of gratitude's enemies.

For the past several weeks, we've been talking about the value of gratitude. We've said that for us as people of faith, gratitude is about more than good manners.

For we who follow Jesus Christ, gratitude is the key that unlocks the kind of peace that Jesus promised his disciples on the night of his betrayal and arrest. In John's gospel, on the night he knew he would be betrayed and arrested, nevertheless Jesus gathered for dinner with those whom he loved, and he said to them, "My peace I give to you. My peace I leave with you. I do not give to you as the world gives, so do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

Theologically understood, gratitude is the recognition that all that we have, all that we are, all that we will ever be, is a

gift from God who is so gracious, so extravagantly generous, that God did not even withhold God's own son from us. Every time we look at the cross, are reminded of the height and depth and width and breadth of God's love for us. For us, gratitude is the key to the kind of peace the Apostle Paul speaks of in a letter he composed from inside a Roman prison, the peace that passes all understanding, the peace that keeps and guards and protects our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of God's only Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

And as we've gone along this month, we've been talking about gratitude, and we've also been naming some of the habits and practices that if we're not careful, can move us away from gratitude. We've been naming some of gratitude's enemies. Already this summer, we've named enemies like nostalgia and worry – the practice of either being so focused on the past or so anxious about the future that we miss the miracles that God is doing in the here and now, right here in our midst. We've named enemies like entitlement and greed.

III

At the heart of our reading today is another of gratitude's enemies – an enemy by the name of disappointment. Our story today centers on a man by the name of Moses. Moses, as you may recall, is one of the heroes of the Old Testament. It was Moses whom God called to free God's people from centuries of brutal slavery at the hands of the Egyptians. It was Moses whom God called to lead God's people through the Red Sea. It was Moses

whom God called to meet with God on the mountain to receive God's law. It was Moses who led the people through the wilderness for all those years.

And when we come to our story today, the journey of the people of God from Egypt back home to the Land of Promise is almost complete. All those years of suffering, all those years of struggle, are almost at an end.

So listen now for a Word from God from Deuteronomy 34:1-12.

34 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, 2 all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, 3 the Negeb, and the Plain—that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—as far as Zoar. 4 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.' 5 Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command. 6 He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. 7 Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigour had not abated. 8 The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab for thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended.

9 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.

10 Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. 11 He was unequalled 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, 12 and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Of all the people that came out of Egypt all those years ago, it would seem that Moses has earned the right to cross that river and enter the Land of Promise. Moses is the one who was called out of the burning bush. Moses was the one who stood up to Pharaoh again and again. Moses was the one who listened to the complaints and murmurs of the people for all those years in the wilderness.

But the text simply states that as a result of Moses' misdemeanor at Meribah, a time when Moses didn't follow the letter of the law, God will keep both Moses and his brother Aaron from setting foot in the Land of Promise, and Moses will die within sight of it.

This is one of those passages that has troubled interpreters of the bible for centuries. It seems so unfair. God seems to treat Moses in such a graceless way. All that work, all that suffering, and one mistake results in Moses not getting to finish the journey. Untold gallons of ink have been spilled by theologians and

biblical interpreters about this part of the Moses story.

But you don't have to have a PhD in theology or biblical studies to know that sometimes, life doesn't make sense. The presentation that you spent so many hours putting together and perfecting gets rejected. The job that you thought you were a shoo-in for goes to another applicant instead. Prayers fervently offered the oncologist's office seem to fall on deaf ears.

Sometimes, all you need is one lousy out, and you just can't seem to get it. Sometimes, one business decision ends up haunting you for the next 86 years.

Moses knew in advance that he would not get to enter the Land of Promise. He knew in advance that his journey would end just short of his intended destination. God told him as much two chapters before we read today's passage.

And yet, a remarkable thing happens. Moses doesn't spend his dying days in bitterness and anger. He doesn't curse God or turn his back on God. In fact, Moses does the opposite. He spends his dying breaths praising God and praying for all those who will enter the Land of Promise in generations to come.

As a much younger man, Moses had stood before the throne of Pharaoh and spoken God's truth to Pharaoh's power. Moses had stood on Mt. Sinai amid the thunder and lightning of God's terrifying presence and lived to tell the tale. Moses had endured test after test after test of his leadership. But perhaps this was Moses most bold act in his long

lifetime of faith— to praise God and to pray for those who would come after him, all the while knowing he himself would not reach the Land of Promise.

IV

And perhaps that is how we, too, can ward off the enemy of disappointment – by praising God and praying for those who will follow us. By investing in the leadership of the next generation. By remembering that our story, as important as it is, is but one small part of a much larger story.

And so that’s my prayer for you, my friend. When disappointments happen, when life seems so unfair, when you come up just short of your intended destination, that God will raise you up to Mt. Pisgah and that God will show you how your story is part of a larger one. My prayer is that you will resist the temptation to fall into despair and bitterness and that you will find it within you to praise God and to pray for an invest in the success of those who will come after you.

V

Centuries after Moses died, another man of deep faith in God would come to know God through God’s Son Jesus Christ. His name was Paul, and he became the first century church’s most important missionary, theologian, and preacher. About half of the books that make up the New Testament were either written by Paul or attributed to him.

Paul, too, endured much over many years for the sake of his faith. Paul, too, set out on a journey but died before he could complete it. Paul, too, knew what it was to battle the enemy of gratitude

named disappointment. Paul, too, knew the importance of investing in the generations that would come after him.

In one of many letters, he wrote this:

8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

He went on to say,

16 So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. 17 For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, 18 because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

Friends, sometimes life doesn’t make sense. Sometimes, we are afflicted. Sometimes, we are perplexed. Sometimes, we are persecuted and struck down. But our story is but part of a larger story – a story where grace and mercy and thanksgiving extends to more and more people to the glory of God.

So we do not lose heart, for though we might endure momentary afflictions, we know we are preparing for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure through the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.

In the midst of our disappointments, in the midst of our struggles, may God invite us high up on to the mountain, and show us the way.

Thanks be to God. Amen.