Our Old Testament text for today took us to the scene of final chapter of Moses’s life. The LORD led Moses alone on top of Mount Nebo, where he was shown the land that the LORD has promised to the Israelites, for as far as he could see. Moses was 120 years old at the time, actually quite “young” compared to other Biblical characters. We were told that his vision remained unimpaired and his physical strength was still strong. I’m sure Moses could’ve continued this journey and finished the task that he was charged to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. But the LORD told Moses that this was as far as he would go. Someone else will take it from here on. “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”

Moses’s faith has taken him to the edge of Mount Nebo overlooking into the Promised Land. Even though Moses was not able to go into the land personally, at least he knew that he has taken his people this far and had already laid his hands and passed on the torch with the new generation of leaders. On one hand, this may seemed like a very sad final scene of the epic story of Moses, but on the other hand it marked a new chapter of the story of God’s covenant people.

Undoubtedly many flashback moments must had crossed Moses’s mind through his time growing up as an Egyptian prince and went into exile while wrestling with his personal struggles, only to be called by God to lead his people out of the bondage of slavery and into the wilderness where the people’s faith were being tested. This might have been the perfect Hollywood ending, with Moses walking up the mountain and disappeared into the smoke to be with God, but the story of God’s covenant people did not end there. The people still had a mission to accomplish. Moses’s leg of the journey might have been over, but a new phase of the journey has just begun with new leaders arisen, ready to face the many new challenges ahead.

Last Sunday, I had the opportunity to worship at my aunt’s church in Edmonton in Alberta, Canada. She was one of the founding members of that congregation who is celebrating its 35th year of faithful ministry this year. What began as a small group prayer, fellowship and Bible Study group in someone’s living rooms, has now blossomed into the largest Chinese church in the city of Edmonton with over 1,000-1,200 regular attendees on any given Sunday, with 3 languages and 9 worship services. Despite its seeming success in terms of numbers, many of its members, including its 11 pastoral staff, remain humble and giving all the credits and glory to God. They were more concerned about the spiritual health and the needs rather than the numbers. Their faith remains strong and fervent after all these years. Many of the patriarchs and matriarchs have passed on the torch of leadership to the newer and younger generation. They’ve served their time and have paved their way and are willing to let the rising leaders run with new energy, vigor and vision in meeting the new challenges of tomorrow.

Many of the leaders were not afraid to take calculated risks and to face new challenges. Being Christian doesn’t mean just coming to church on Sundays but living out one’s faith and honoring God’s teaching through prayer and devotion each day. By no mean they would congratulated one another, patted themselves on their back for their own personal accomplishment. **But it was all about God’s grace and what God has done through their faithful obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit.**

Their pastor challenged the congregation to take a step back, put aside any personal ego, recount God’s blessings and rededicate their lives for the mission of God for its people. Instead of asking the question of what does God have installed for me and my future, a better question for us to ask would be, ***“what roles can I play in God’s plan for our future?”*** The pastor was speaking not only for their local church context but for the church in general, regardless of its denomination, demographic makeups, its history or availability of resources…that **the church will constantly find itself either at the edge of a cliff (about to fall off) or at the frontier overlooking the promised land. The church is only one generation away from extinction if we do not pass on the torch in developing new leaders of the future.**

In the same way, the Israelites who were enslaved for generations and wandered out in the desert for years, they too were living a liminal space (a state of in-between-ness) with their “faith on the edge”. **They were one generation from enslavement to freedom; one generation from extinction out in the wilderness or to set foot upon the Promised Land filled with “milk and honey”.** The people have a choice of either to die out in the wilderness or to keep their faith alive and march into the Promised Land (when and where the Spirit leads them).

Some had become weary and tired of running this journey. Some had expressed doubt in their faith, lost their vision and squandered God’s opportunities, blessings and hope for the future. Some had turned to their own gods (upon their own strengths and abilities) instead of worshipping the one true God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Despite the covenant that God has established with them, many of those Israelites were still lacking in faith. *How much farther do we still have to go? How much longer do we still have to eat this manna and meander through the wilderness?* Note that none of the faithless generation who left Egypt, including Moses himself, made it into the Promised Land. Only those who were born during the exodus (outside of Egypt) eventually set foot into the land that God had promised. Nevertheless God remained faithful to His own word and His own people. God will see for His mission and purpose to complete in due time.

Well, let’s fast-forward to the present time in 2014. Has anything changed since? Don’t we still find ourselves asking those same questions, wrestling with our faith and our trust in God’s leadership? We still strive to remain faithful in serving God and God’s people both within and beyond the community in which we are called. Doing ministry in the 21st century has become more complex and more challenging than ever before….yet the mission and the purpose remain the same – to make God’s presence known among God’s people and to inspire faith among those who are faithless. The church once again finds itself in a liminal space, with one foot on the dry ground while another still in the sea. We might have crossed the “Red Sea” and through the wilderness but we are still wrestling among ourselves with our faith and trust in God’s leading. **Our faithfulness in the living God serves as a pivot point to our destiny of either in the wilderness or in the Promised Land.**

On this last Sunday in October, the church dedicates this day as the Reformation Sunday, in honor of the Protestant Reformation that took place in the 16th century Europe. The intent of the reformation was NOT meant to cause a religious uproar or a revolution against the established Roman Catholic Church, but rather a personal spiritual reflection leading towards a return of one’s faith in a purer form. **It was about setting our relationship and focus right where it belongs…back in God, rather than individuals or the institution.** The Reformers believed the church had become corrupt, so changes were necessary. It was a change in the interest of preservation and restoration of more authentic faith and life.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Many Reformed Christians today continue to use the motto of ***“a church reformed and always to be reformed, according to the word of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit.”*** This motto reminds us of not only **who we are** and **who we are intended to be by God**.

When we claim that we are reformed and always being reformed, we declare our commitment to examine our lives and remain faithful to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and not ours. We profess that God is the agent of reformation, not by our human means or the church’s. But rather God works through us and the church to manifest God’s purpose and good will for the benefit of all of God’s people. People, society or even the church might have changed, but God’s faithfulness to God’s people remains steadfast. Scripture reminds us that *"All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever."[[2]](#footnote-2)* God’s word and God’s promise anchors our faith when we are going through challenging and difficult moments in our lives.

In this ever-changing world that we live in today, being reformed doesn’t always mean that we are to conform with the values of the world but it rather invites us to reflect upon God’s faithfulness by holding on to God’s conviction and purpose in humankind. We are invited to take a stand and be different from others. As the Apostle Paul reminded us, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God -- what is good and acceptable and perfect.”[[3]](#footnote-3)*

It is not easy to be Christian in the 21st Century. At times we might feel like we are swimming upstream against the river current. We may find ourselves exhausting our energy, opportunities and resources, and at the end asking ourselves the question of *“why do we do what we do? Why do continue to meander through the wilderness in the pursuit of the Promised Land?”*

All of us are on a mission (whether you’re 95 or 65 or 5 months old) to do our part in order to accomplish what God has set before us to do, just like those salmons that made their “final journey” home in order to pave the way for their next generation. At times we may find ourselves with our “faith on the edge.” We try our best to stay on-course and not fall off the edge of the cliff. However, like the Israelites, God has promised to lead us by our faith, through leaps and bound, in order to catch a glimpse of the Promised Land.

Let us then put our ***“Faith on the Edge”*** by being opened to the leading Spirit and trusting to God’s faithfulness. The Holy Spirit lifts up our **courage** and **prophetic voices** when we are seemingly lost out in the wilderness or when our voices are being silenced. It invites us to **be still** and to **know who God is** and to **listen for God’s calling** in our lives. It invites us to live out the **holiness** and the **wholeness** of Christ’s body as one unified church, despite of our differences and diversities.

***We are reformed and always to be reformed, according to the word of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit.*** Thanks be to God, Amen.

1. Case-Winters Anna May 2004 *Presbyterians Today* http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/today/reformed/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *1 Peter 1:24-25* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Romans 12:2* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)