

Sermon Pentecost 21A - Semicontinuous Reading

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All Saints, Mt. Pleasant

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Exodus 33:12-23

12Moses said to the Lord, “See, you have said to me, ‘Bring up this people’; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’ 13Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.”

14He said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” 15And he said to him, “If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. 16For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.”

17The Lord said to Moses, “I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” 18Moses said, “Show me your glory, I pray.” 19And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, ‘The Lord’; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. 20But,” he said, “you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.” 21And the Lord continued, “See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; 22and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; 23then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.”

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It’s getting to be that time of year as cooler “sweater weather” arrives, Lutherans prepare for upcoming commemorations like Reformation Sunday, All Saints Day, then after a few weeks to finish up the season of Pentecost, we’ll have Christ the King and then on to the start of Advent. If you’ve been following along with the semi-continuous Old Testament readings, you’ll notice that after the upcoming festivals, we won’t hear any more about Moses. A few weeks ago, we heard about the Exodus out of Egypt Then the giving of the 10 Commandments and while he was still up on Mt. Sinai the people turn to idol worship with the Golden Calf.

When we come back to the story after All Saints Sunday, the wandering in the wilderness will be over, and the people of Israel will have arrived in the promised land. under the leadership of Moses’ successor, Joshua. Today's reading from the book of Exodus represents a turning point Literally - God turns and shows his back side to Moses! But it marks the transition between the time at Sinai to the start of the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

We find Moses having this very raw emotional episode as he’s communicating with the Lord on the mountain. God has surrounded Moses and his people in this place of revelation, and, yes, of challenge. This is where they have had to figure out if they really are a people like God commissioned them to be. *Will their their commitment stand up in the wilderness? Will their faith in the God whom*

they cannot see stand up against the temptation of idols? Will their unity carry them when they feel aimless?

God is sending on toward the promised land, and we find Moses pleading with God to be with them, to show himself, to reveal his glory. Moses had heard God speak to him from the burning bush. He'd been given the name of God: The great "I AM" He'd experienced God in the cloud of lightning and thunder. Some even described Moses' relationship with God like speaking with a friend, face to face (sound like a contradiction). But in this moment, Moses demands something more. If he's going to have the strength to lead this people in the wilderness, he needs a sign.

With transition often comes anxiety and we encounter an fretful Moses here at this turning point doing a little bargaining with God. "See," Moses says, "you have said to me, 'Bring up this people'; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me." Moses is beginning to feel the weight of the world on his shoulders; he's beginning to panic. He challenges God, saying "You have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.'" "You have told me." But, that is not enough. "Show me," Moses pleads. "Show me your glory, I pray."

Moses needs more. He needs assurance. He needs to know he does not embark upon this journey alone. And to punctuate his plea, he throws in one last bargaining chip. "Remember!" he reminds God "that this nation is your people." "If not for me," he's saying. "Do it for them." The request he's making is a bold one. And also a dangerous one apparently. God warns Moses that "no one can see my face and live." So God refuses, saying basically, "you can't handle me" (at least not on this side of heaven.)

God can see that Moses is distressed, and God knows the long journey that lies ahead of his servant. So God compromises. He says, "I will put you in the cleft of the rock. I will cover you with my hand, and after I have passed by, if you look, you will see the backside of my glory." Almighty God, in their infinite wisdom, knows what Moses needs as he stands on this precipice (both literally and figuratively)...and knows his limits as well.

Have you ever found yourself in a moment where you feel like you're standing on the edge of a major transition. Maybe, like Moses, you were being sent out from your comfort zone? Even if the "comfort zone" has its own problems. - opposition, fear, loneliness - but at least it's familiar. Maybe you've been in a situation where, even though things aren't perfect, the prospect of the unknown is even more formidable. and wow, would a sign from the Lord go a long way to quell those fears. I don't know about you, but I've definitely found myself on the bargaining end of a negotiation with God.

Well, as we heard, God does not grant Moses what he wants: to see God's face. But God does remind him of what he already has and then provides him what he needs. God reminds Moses of what he already has: he has the grace of God (that's been made quite clear) and he has the name of God... to call upon, to be in relationship with, to know. And what God does provide for Moses in this moment of stress is protection - God places him in the cleft of the rock and covers him with his hand - and gives him a glimpse of the glory he seeks after the Lord passes by.

Oftentimes, when we find ourselves in times of stress, anxiety or transition, God reminds us what we already have and promises to provide for us. God reminds us that through whatever we're going through, we have been given God's grace - his mercy when we falter - and we've been God's name to call upon, to know, to be in relationship with, no mediator or middle-man required.

And although it may not be everything we asked for when we arrived at the divine bargaining table. God provides for us what we need - God's goodness, God's provision, and God's protection. In

our times of fear and change, we are given the same words God spoke to Moses: “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” And, if we’re paying attention... ..if we have our eyes open to that presence, sometimes we’ll also be given a fleeting glance of the glory of the great I AM.

You know, we call this the house of God. Like Moses in the tabernacle, we come here to be in the presence of God. But the way Scripture warns about the dangers of seeing the God’s face maybe what we’re here to see is a glimpse of God’s backside? Maybe that would be a great name for a church: *The Holy Tabernacle of the Lord's Rear End*.

But you know, Moses was not the last one to ask to see God. Throughout the generations of saints and sinners we kept asking, we kept seeking. And in time, God in God's infinite goodness provided us exactly what we needed, provided us the name that is above all names in Jesus, the one who came to meet us face to face to say to us “Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

Jesus, who on the night in which he was betrayed in his hour of suffering, wanted nothing more than to have one more glimpse of the faces of his friends to gather them in around him as a hen gathers her chicks, to hide them in the cleft of the rock, if only for a few hours to feed them from his own hand, to give them what they would need to withstand the sight of the cross on which was revealed in his weakness the true glory of God.

As we gather here to be fed by the hand of God at the Lord’s table May we feel Christ sheltering us here in the shadow of his wings, hiding us here in the cleft of the rock of ages if only for a short while before we are sent out, once again, to face whatever unknowns tomorrow brings. Maybe that would be a great church name: *Cleft of the Rock Church*, where we come to be sheltered in Jesus’ name.

Here, we come hungering, as the psalms says, to “see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” Here, we come, thirsting for a glimpse of the glory of God. Here, we break away from the push and pull of the world to let ourselves be sheltered by the Rock, to be protected by his hand and find the rest we need to carry on.