

From Rearview to Up Close and Personal

January 16, 2011

Scripture: 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."

Luke 11:1-13

¹He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."

²He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.

³Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial."

Proclamation of the Word

Show me the money! "Show me your glory," Moses says to the Lord.

When tragedy strikes:

In Tucson, a young man guns down public servants with no regard for innocent life

A flash tsunami consumes an Australian town

A loved one writhes in chronic pain

Lebanon is caught in the cross fire of Middle East troubles, left without a government

Show me your face, Lord. Moses and the people are looking for a sign. Just like we do when the way seems unclear or confusion sets in. The people of God have always been on a journey. The most important journey is the one of seeking God. The Exodus Scripture we read comes just on the heels of the whole "Golden Calf debacle". The people are seeking and searching for something solid and sure. They so want to know God is there that they settle for melted down jewelry which they fashion into a farm animal.

But Moses is the one who has an inside connection with Yhwh God.

Moses did not necessarily want the job, but has been the leader of this people who are God's people. And when the people go astray or feel lost, Moses is the man who pleads with God, brings messages from God, and reminds the people of the God who brought them up out of the land of Egypt and will continually lead them.

We need leaders like Moses. We need those who will remind us that we are God's people. Moses tells us that God is leading us even when it looks like we have taken a wrong turn, or things are not working out as we had expected. Yhwh God has always raised up human prophets who have a cast a vision when our eyes blur and who seek the face of God in order to know which way to turn.

On this holiday weekend, we know another Moses that led a people for a while. Martin Luther King, with speech and action, led this nation through some dark days, casting light on the sin of racism and social injustice. A nation with a vision statement that claims, on the one hand,

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

— Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, 1776

...and on the other hand, we have struggled to deal with who has what rights and who is really equal. Who has the right to carry semi-automatic weapons at any cost, the right to my happiness, even if it cost you yours. Even though the declaration states all men are equal, we treat some people as second class citizens.

Moses was the one who interpreted to God's covenant people that God was with them, no matter what. Moses is the intercessor, the mediator, the one who intervenes on behalf of Yhwh God to the people and vice versa. What an exhausting job! Even Moses needed to know that God was leading them forward.

When Moses is fed-up and argues with God to lead this people, who are his children, God reminds him that his presence is with them.

But that is not enough, so Moses asks for a sign. "Show me your glory, Lord." The burning bush, a pillar of fire and cloud, the tent of meeting, even the tabernacle of God is not enough, Lord. Even the Temple will not be enough for the faithful.

Moses asks to see God's glory, but what does he get? He gets a rearview of God. God shows the holy backside, and will not fully reveal his face until Jesus walks the earth.

Moses is not the first who wants to see God's glory.

Adam and Eve wanted to know in Eden.

"We want to know what you know God. We want to understand."

Isn't it interesting that when Moses requests God's glory, God's face, he gets a rearview only?

I feel like that sometimes. When injustice strikes, I want to see God face to face.

Or when a seemingly senseless act of violence is committed, I demand an audience with God.

When it feels like God has left the building, I cry out to the Lord asking, "Where are you in all this mess?"

And the people of God have had those conversations with God since ancient days. It is how we pray.

Communicating with the Holy One means trusting God enough with questions, with grief, even with anger.

This is how we pray.

Moses has an honest, trusting relationship with Yhwh God.

So when he demands to see God's glory, God is gracious enough to show Moses just enough of himself. Yhwh God even goes to the trouble of safely placing Moses in the cleft of the rock and covering Moses with the holy hand. Moses sees just enough of God to know that God is with him and with God's people. And that is enough.

But for those of us who can see more clearly through the rearview mirror of history, we know God raises up another Moses. God sends his own Son, to show us the face of God. Jesus Christ is most clearly God's face and a reminder that

he is continually with us. God decides that a place of God's presence: a tent, a Tabernacle, a Temple, is not enough, and God will live among us himself. After giving his life on a cross, the curtain of the Temple is torn, and Jesus is raised up in resurrection glory. No longer will people have to seek God through an intercessor like Moses, we see God face to face in Jesus.

And the self-giving love of Jesus reveals the glory of God like the world has never seen before.
God, who gives Moses a rearview, comes up close, and personal in Jesus the Messiah.

When Jesus walks the earth, he teaches his disciples. When they ask Jesus to teach them to pray, he says, this is how. "Father, hallowed is your name. Your name is holy. Your kingdom come. Give us daily bread. Forgive us as we forgive. Lead us through trying times."

We can seek the God who already knows us by name because we are his people.

We are God's children.

We pray to our Father, not through Moses.

And while sometimes we lose our way. We chase after idols, build a golden calf, and forget how to sing God's praise.

In the praying...in the seeking...in the living a Christian life,

We live in the presence of God.

The events of this week has caused most of us to question what is going on in our world- a world where someone thinks it is okay to take the lives of innocent people.

Even when it seems that Yhwh God has hidden his face from us, we trust, we pray, and we work for a kingdom that is out of this world.

Some of us have signed the *Pledge for Peace and Civility* with the Sojourners Christian Community in Washington, DC. As people who follow Christ and are the body of Christ in the world, we live by a higher standard and lead by example.

Based on Biblical principles, some of the commitments of the *Pledge for Peace and Civility* include:

1. We will refrain from physical violence, and violence of speech and heart.
2. In our dialogue we will be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry (James 1:19)
3. When we disagree, we will do so respectfully.
4. We will pray. We will pray for our political leaders, even those with whom we disagree. And when we pray for people, it is harder to hate them.

These are commitments Christians and churches make as we seek God's face.

Even as we pray to God, we live as those committed to Christ's intentions for human life.

We follow Jesus as he teaches us, trusting that he who is truth, the way, and the life- especially in the face of a culture bent on destruction of life.

We need Jesus to teach us now more than ever.

So will you answer the call to pray, to seek, and to live as his faithful ones?

I began with the question, "Is God with us?"

but I think the more important question is, "Are we with God?"

Prayer: You know each of us by name, O God, and in your sight we have found favor, yet our minds cannot comprehend the vision of your glory or the vastness of your love.

Grant that as we glimpse your greatness, reflected in your many gifts,

we may always return to you the praise that is yours alone.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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