

“To See The Face Of God”

Scripture: Exodus 33:12-23

Date: October 19, 2008

“God, are you with us or not? If you are, then give us a sign! Don’t play coy with us. We’re your people, remember? Come on, Lord! Show yourself.

“Let me *see* you – face to face. I want to know your plans for my life? I don’t like it when you hide these things away. Where are you taking me? Are you *with* me on this journey, or not?”

Have you ever prayed like this? Have you ever *wanted* to pray like this, but held back. Because you think it’s too impertinent. Too raw. Too demanding.

Too honest, perhaps.

It’s not the way you were taught to pray. With language borrowed from the King James Version of the Bible.

This language is older than that. It’s the prayer that Moses used, flung out of the depths of his soul to the heights of heaven. To the God who led him and his people into the wilderness, so far from the polite language and high culture of civilization.

All of us are on a journey with God. We don’t always know where God is leading us. We do not know what lies ahead.

Moses does not pray a timid prayer. He’s bold, intense. He goes for broke in his relationship with God.

Moses tells God that if God is not going to go with his people, then God may as well cancel the trip right now. Moses wants no part of a life without God.

“Show me your ways, Lord.” Put your plans on the table, where I can see them. I want you to *prove* your favour toward me. “Show me your glory!”

“Show me your glory” – whatever that means. I wonder if he had any idea? Did Moses have the foggiest clue what he was demanding of the Lord?

There are lots of things I’d love to know. Probably you would too. In an unpredictable and sometimes scary world where acts of terror can erupt at any time, and economic systems can be rocked to their very foundation, and apartment buildings can be sold out from underneath us, and health can suddenly and unexpectedly give way ... We want to know what is coming, what lies ahead for us on the journey.

God tells Moses to go forward. But stubborn old Moses, *he’s* not going anywhere without some kind of divine reassurance.

“Give me a sign,” said one young woman, caught in the midst of an agonizing decision in her life. Wanting to know which way to turn. “Give me a bright red flashing neon light.

Something clear and unambiguous. A way to know who you are and what you want from me.” But God does not always answer as we would wish.

All of us want to know God. It’s how we’re made. In the image of God. With a soul that longs for God. With an empty place inside that only God can fill.

So Moses prays to know God. It’s not *just* a roadmap for the future that he desires.

Moses wants to grow in his understanding of God. To comprehend God’s character. To see God’s goodness. To know God, as God really is. “Show me, Lord. Let me see you face to face.”

Moses’ prayer is all about relationship. *Real* relationship. The kind that goes beyond the surface and superficial, polite-sounding words. Moses’ relationship with God includes protest and complaint. Confession and forgiveness. Tenderness and intimacy. Love

There is room for mystery. *Not* knowing the answers to all things, as much as we would like.

We can never plumb the depths of another person’s being. Even a spouse, a child, a parent, a sibling, our very best friend. As well as we *think* we know them, we never know them completely, do we?

That’s what makes life interesting. We’re not *entirely* predictable. We are never *fully* known. After 25 years of marriage we can still be wonderfully, delightfully, surprised! We never stop growing in these relationships of love.

And if that is true in our human lives, how much more in our relationship with God!

Moses asks to see God’s glory. But God will only *partially* comply. “I’ll make my goodness pass before you. And listen – I’ll proclaim my name.

“Yahweh” – “I am who I am.” “I will be who I will be.” “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.” God proclaims God’s sovereign freedom!

There’s a tension in this passage. Between a God who is distant and a God who is near. A God who is so far beyond our human grasp and understanding, and a God who purposefully, lovingly, chooses to be involved with every detail of our lives. It’s never just one or the other, but always *both*.

Sometimes I think we forget the holiness of this God. A God who says to Moses, “You cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.”

This is a dangerous God, a God of power and might. A God of majesty and awe. Get too close to this God and you will be consumed. Get too much of this God, and it will blow you away!

We cannot take the mystery out of God. We cannot simply downsize God to make him [sic] fit in our back pockets. So we can carry him around and pull him out whenever we need him.

It happens all the time though, doesn't it? We pare God down to human size. Far too often we use God to promote our nationalism and patriotism. God's name is invoked to promote intolerance and exclusion. To justify our own selfish lifestyle and promote judgement upon our neighbours.

"I want you to do this *my* way, God. Look, I've got it all planned out. This is what I want you to do. This is what I want you to be."

We make God far too small. Too familiar. Too narrowly partisan.

Too easily dismissed.

Moses asks God to reveal God's glory. Is that even possible?

This God will not do everything that Moses asks. "You cannot see my face," God says. "That would be too much."

"But here's what I will do. I will put you in a cleft of the rock. And when my awesome glory passes by, I'll cover you with my hand.

"And after I've passed by, *then* – then you shall see me. Not full on. It will be a partial glimpse of my glory. "

Perhaps a *partial glimpse* of God is the best that any of us can hope for.

We never know all there is to know of God. We can never plumb the depths of God's greatness or the mystery of God's love. But this God has chosen to reveal God's self to us.

This is a God who chooses to be involved in our lives. A God who "con-descends", who *comes down to be with* an enslaved people in the land of Egypt. A God who promises to journey with them through the wilderness and lead them to a promised land.

It's not Moses who *makes* this happen. It's *God* who chooses to be with this people, and through this action God's glory *is* revealed.

God, are you with us on this journey?

The answer is yes! We don't know every detail of the way that lies before us. And we cannot know everything about the God who travels with us.

But we have seen God's glory revealed to us in Jesus. As much of God as we can know. As much of God as we need – to lead us and guide us.

The writer of the Gospel of John says, "We *have* seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

The God of heaven has come to live among us. The God of all power and majesty is revealed to us – in Jesus!

“He is the image of the invisible God ...” says another writer in the New Testament. “In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.” The fullness of God! As much of God as we can possibly comprehend.

“He who has seen *me* has seen the Father,” Jesus said.

“God, are you with me on this journey?”

Oh yes! God *is* with us. This is as close to God as we can get: A glimpse of God’s glory in the One who came to live among us. God gives this vision to the whole world!

And it’s enough. Enough to keep us going. Enough to give us hope. Enough for us to know God’s great and powerful presence in our lives. And more than that – God’s everlasting, never-failing love.

Who could ask for anything more than that?