

The Second Sunday after Epiphany  
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Minneapolis, Minnesota

✧ Jesu juva ✧

## GOD'S PRESENCE AND GLORY AMONG US

Exodus 33:12-23; John 2:1-11

Grace, Mercy and Peace be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

One gets the sense from Moses' words today that he was doubtful concerning God's intentions toward Israel, and whether or not God would remain with them. Now this lesson is after the main event of Exodus has already taken place. The people have been led by God out of Egypt. They've crossed the Red Sea. They now are encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai. Surely Moses' should have had confidence in the Lord by this point in time, right?

And He indeed did. Moses' anxiety about leading the people by himself is not brought about by a lack of faith on his part, but by the Lord's own words earlier in the chapter that was read: "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Depart and go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, "To your descendants I will give it." And I will send My Angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey...' No problem so far, but then the Lord continues "for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people." So Moses is worried about not having God with them because God has said He will not go with them. He would go before them and drive out their enemies, but He would not abide with them because His presence would destroy them.

Now at this time, Exodus tells us, the Tabernacle of the Lord had not yet been constructed and the Lord had not yet attached the promise of His presence to that place. Instead, it was at Moses' own tent, pitched outside of the rest of the camp, that the Lord would speak with Moses. Moses called his tent the tabernacle of meeting, not to be confused with the later tabernacle that the Israelites are commanded to build for the Lord. Exodus tells us: "when Moses entered the tabernacle, that the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses. All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the tabernacle door, and all the people rose and worshiped, each man in his tent door. So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend."

Now it is in just such a meeting that the exchange you heard today takes place between Moses and the Lord. Moses pleads that the Lord would not depart from His people. "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth." The great concern, of course, was that God would remain with them and lead them into the promised land. Moses basically says, look if you aren't going with us, then don't bother sending us, because we will not survive as a people in this strange land. And instead of abandoning the people on account of their stiff-necked

nature and actions, the Lord promises to go with them. "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name."

Then Moses asks to see the Lord's glory. Now even though the conversations described took place "face to face, as a man speaks to his friend", Moses had not actually seen the Lord's face. The Lord was still shrouded in the pillar of cloud, a shrouding that was intended to protect Moses and the people who looked on from the glory of His presence, which glory would destroy them if it was displayed in its fullness. So the Lord says: "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." This, then, is the way the Lord was to be known by Moses, through His goodness, compassion, and grace. Seeing God's face directly would destroy Moses, which was something God did not want to have happen; but seeing His glorious goodness and grace, that He desired Moses and really all of the Israelites to receive. Then the Lord, having placed Moses in the cleft of the rock, allows Moses to see His backside, but not His face.

And this was the state of affairs throughout most of the Israelites history. They were to be the recipients of God's grace, compassion and goodness; but they could not see His face or abide in His glorious presence directly. This was the whole point of constructing the ark of the covenant and the tabernacle to house the ark. No one could go up into the Holy of Holies of that tabernacle, in the room that held the ark where God had located His presence among them. Anyone venturing in there, except one time each year when the High Priest entered, was immediately destroyed. The presence of the Lord among them was for their good, but His holiness was also dangerous to them, for they were not holy in themselves. No one could look upon the face of God or abide in His presence.

The incarnation of God in Jesus changes all of that. In Jesus, God comes to live and work, to walk and talk with His people. In fact, His appearance among them is hardly even noticed. He looks like an ordinary Jew, and was an ordinary Jew according to His humanity. So it should not be surprising that the people at the wedding in Cana did not realize that God Himself had come to celebrate their wedding with them. Only a few people at that wedding had any idea who Jesus really was. Mary knew for certain. After all, she was His mother, and had heard and believed the angelic Word which said He would be the Son of God. She knew that He had no human father, but that He was literally the God's child born into the flesh through her. And the disciples knew to a certain extent who Jesus was. They had heard John the Baptist's testimony that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of God, even if they didn't yet understand everything that meant.

And at first, Jesus seems hesitant to reveal Himself. When Mary asks Him to do something about the wine having run out, Jesus chides her: "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." And once He has miraculously changed the water into wine, very few understand that a miracle has taken place. The master of feast, even, is unaware, supposing the bridegroom to have kept the best wine until the end, even though that didn't make much sense to do. Yet, the servants, the disciples and Mary knew what had been done. And John tells us "This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him."

In Jesus God had come again to dwell among His people and bless them. But now, they could look on His face, the face of Jesus. Still, the raw glory of God could not be endured, but now

instead of being shrouded in a pillar of cloud, it was hidden under flesh and blood. The glory is revealed here in the miraculous sign, not in an unleashing of the raw, destructive power of Jesus' holiness. But the glory was manifested to the disciples, that they might know that God was dwelling among them, much as Jesus had manifested His glory long before to Moses by showing Moses His backside.

Moreover, the sign by which Jesus' glory was made manifest is no trivial thing, as it may appear at first glance to be. There is more going on here than simply providing wine for a feast, though that is indeed the most tangible and certainly an enjoyable result. Jesus uses water and wine to manifest His glory because water and wine will become the chief signs of His presence among His people, and the way He reveals His glory to them.

Recall what the Lord wanted Moses and the Israelites to see and know about Him. "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." He wanted them to know His goodness. He wanted His name and grace and compassion proclaimed and given to them. And the same is true today. He wants you to know His goodness, and to receive His name, grace and compassion through His own proclamation.

Where does that happen? It happens through water and wine, and the preaching that accompanies these miraculous signs. In the water, the Lord places His name upon you and calls you His own. He declares you to be a new creature, a son of God upon whom He will bestow all His gifts. By baptism He comes to you and dwells with you through His Word, hidden in water. And of course there is the wine of the feast at Holy Communion. Here again our Lord comes to you concealed in the cup under the sign of the wine. But the wine is not just a sign. It is, by virtue of His declaration and promise, the very blood of Jesus - blood which gives you a share not just in God's presence, but of God's life.

Through these sacraments God comes to be present and lead his people toward the promised land of heaven. Without His presence we could not go up. But He has promised to be with us, and having vanquished our enemies, to lead us in. Having died for our sins and risen for our salvation, Jesus now gives that salvation through His proclamation and through the water and the wine. In water that has been made saving and in wine that has been made Holy Blood, our Lord God shines His gracious and compassionate face upon us and we see His glory, the glory of his goodness. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, to life everlasting.



✧ Soli Deo gloria ✧