

Exodus 33:12-23

**“Unless You Go With Us”**

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***The Good News Version of the Scripture Reading: Exodus 33:12-23***

Introductory Piece:

Children, please gather around for the Bible story. This fall, we are listening to the stories from the book of Exodus about how God freed the Hebrew people from slavery. Today the story tells us about a conversation between Moses and God before they went forward toward the Promised Land.

The Story:

12 Moses said to the Lord, “It is true that you have told me to lead these people to that land, but you did not tell me whom you would send with me. You have said that you know me well and are pleased with me. 13 Now if you are, tell me your plans, so that I may serve you and continue to please you. Remember also that you have chosen this nation to be your own.”

14 The Lord said, “I will go with you, and I will give you victory.”

15 Moses replied, “If you do not go with us, don’t make us leave this place. 16 How will anyone know that you are pleased with your people and with me if you do not go with us? Your presence with us will distinguish us from any other people on earth.”

17 The Lord said to Moses, “I will do just as you have asked, because I know you very well and I am pleased with you.”

18 Then Moses requested, “Please, let me see the dazzling light of your Glory.”

19 The Lord answered, “I will make all my splendor pass before you and in your presence I will pronounce my sacred name. I am the Lord, and I show compassion and pity on those I choose. 20 I will not let you see my face, because no one can see me and stay alive, 21 but here is a place beside me where you can stand on a rock. 22 When the dazzling light of my presence passes by, I will put you in an opening in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will take my hand away, and you will see my back but not my face.”

Through today’s scripture reading, I think I hear Moses singing: “**Just a closer walk with thee**, grant it, Jesus, is my plea, daily walking close to thee: Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.”

Admittedly, Moses already had a close relationship with God. He regularly heard the Divine voice, even had conversations with the Almighty! Moses carried God’s authority too, and the people relied upon him for communications from on high and guidance. Moses and God were close; in earlier verses, the people even thought that Moses *did* see God face to face (33:11).

**Yet Moses wanted more.**

Maybe he desired more closeness because the people had so damaged the covenant with God that as their leader, Moses felt some of the collective guilt for how they had backslid into sin during his absence. Even Moses felt spiritually insecure after this crisis.

Moses may also have wanted more closeness because now this people would have to go forward with hard work into uncertainty, just as our President, to govern our nation, will have to iron out so much between red and blue after the election!

As the human leader, Moses wanted to feel close to the Divine Leader, even closer than is humanly possible, **so he pushed this negotiation with God to the limit.** Moses requested to see God's face or Glory (33:18) – the supreme brilliance of God's essence!

There is a comedy segment in the Marx Brothers movie, *A Day at the Races*, when a blonde seductress is trying to put Groucho into a compromising position. She presses herself against him, asking him to hold her closer, closer, closer, to which he rejoins, "Any closer, and I'd be behind you!"

**There are limits to how close we can get to God,** and Moses had reached his "No." We are not the same being, God and me, or God and you. God is still "Other" to us. In Jesus Christ, we are brought as close as possible, yet distinguishable.

Even so, **let us not overlook the assurances of God to us in this passage!** Back in verse 15, for example, it is as if Moses hadn't heard the good news to his earliest request for God's presence. God had said: "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." But immediately afterward, Moses replied, "If your presence will *not* go, do not carry us up from here..." Expecting a "No" and eager to protest, Moses missed the affirmation he so desperately was looking for!

So it is that I do not want you to overlook the assurances that God has given us during our varied moments of trial and spiritual insecurity:

**First of all,** God has reassured us through Moses that we have **found favor.** Despite our sin, we have pleased God. (33:17) If you are feeling lost in the morass of economic uncertainty, remember that God favors you and is working in your situation for equilibrium.

**Secondly,** through Moses and Jesus Christ, God has guaranteed that **God's Presence** *will* go with us into the future, even to the end of the age! God's name, God's goodness, God's grace, and God's mercy go before us as the church – as people of faith. (33:14, 19)

**In the third place,** God emphasizes how God **knows us**, who we are, what we need, what it's like to both doubt and to rejoice! So even when *we* don't know much – for example, when we are in dismay over our children and worried about their well-being – God assures us that they *are* known (33:12, 17).

**Finally,** the language of the negotiation between Moses and God becomes physical. God starts speaking as if the Holy One has a face and hands, feet and legs. This shift really spoke to me this past week, as I dealt with physical side effects of the chemo – to envision God giving a human embrace was helpful!

Anyway, God **invites Moses on a walking prayer**, shows him a split rock to hide in, guarantees a hand to protect him from Divine Glory, and once it is possible, gives Moses a glimpse of **God's back side**.

And what other view do you and I really need to be able to follow? Or to assure a closer walk with God?!