

“Please Show Me Your Glory”

Exodus 33:12-23 • Psalm 99 • 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 • Matthew 22:15-22

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We’re going to do something little different today. Actually, more than a *little* different.

I was faced with a bit of a quandary when I considered the scripture passages for today. The Gospel story is about the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus and, in the presence of the administrators who supported the Roman government, asking Jesus point-blank about whether or not people should pay taxes. I *could* preach on that passage ... I’ve done it before ... but honestly ... this time around ... it just didn’t feel right. There are now *two* major wars going on; *thousands* of civilians have been killed in the past couple weeks, many of them children; there’s a *massive* humanitarian crisis; a couple hundred people, including some U.S. citizens, are being held hostage; and to top it off, our Congress has been *completely paralyzed*, for the first time in our nation’s history, unable to accomplish *anything*, for nearly three weeks now. I really just don’t feel like talking about *taxes* right now!

So there’s the opening passage from First Thessalonians. I could talk to you about what was going on in the Greek provinces of Macedonia and Achaia a couple thousand years ago and how that prompted Paul to write that letter ... but it would be a stretch to say that’s *relevant* right now.

That leaves the Psalm passage, which is all about God’s kingship, and some of God’s attributes, and our need to worship God, which is what we’re doing; and the passage from Exodus, which, frankly, is rather *bizarre*. I mean, Moses is asking God for some assurances, and even asks to see God’s glory, a request that God grants – sort of – by passing by Moses while he hides in a cleft, and all Moses can see is God’s back. What in the world does God’s *back* look like, and how did it benefit Moses to see it?

But as I was looking at that Exodus passage, something struck me. *Five words* struck me. Moses’s bold and pleading request to God: “*Please show me your glory.*” Something was going on inside Moses that caused him to make that request. This story falls right after an ugly *rebellion* of the Israelites, when they were worshipping a golden calf, as if *that* were God. Maybe Moses was weary; maybe he had just seen too much. Maybe he needed something *beautiful* to hold onto. Maybe he needed a renewing of his *hope*. Maybe he needed to know that – after *everything* – God was *still there*.

We hear the news coming out of Gaza and Israel; we see the images. I can’t tell you how many times over the last two weeks tears have welled up in my eyes. Maybe *we’re* weary. Maybe *we’ve* seen too much. Maybe *we* need something beautiful to hold onto. Maybe *we* need a renewing of our hope. Maybe *we* need to know that – after everything – God is *still here*. “Please, God ... *show us your glory.*”

Moses wanted to see God. God granted that request. I can’t replicate that. But what I *can* do is show you some *signs* of God’s glory. Some reminders that *God is still here*. Even after ... *everything*.

So, as I said when I began, we're going to do something a little different today. A *lot* different. We're going to spend about ten minutes in silence ... while I *show you some signs of God's glory*. You don't have to *do* anything. All I want you to do is sit back, relax, and take in some images that are *very* different than the ones that have been flooding our airwaves these past couple weeks. There are *terrible* things happening in our world ... and yet *God's glory remains*. Just let these images flow into you. Let them *refresh* you. Let them *rekindle* your heart. Let them remind you: *God is still here*.

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In case you're wondering ... what you just saw were pictures from a number of national parks, here and elsewhere. You saw a variety of animals, on earth and in the sea and sky. You saw some beauty from our own state of Michigan. You saw our planet, other planets in our solar system, the sun, and the moon. And you saw a tiny bit of the rest of the universe. *All of these are things that God designed and fashioned and created*. All of them, each in their own way, point to the *glory* that is God.

Moses wanted to see God's glory. I can't show you *that*. But I can tell you – and show you – that *yes, there still is a God*. Despite everything that is wrong with our world, *God's glory still remains*.

Somehow we have to hold onto the tension between the *beauty* that is God and the *horror* that we humans can do to other humans. If we see too much of the *horror*, we might lose sight of the *beauty*, and that would be tragic, and our souls would suffer. But on the flip side, if all we want to see is the *beauty*, if we just want to *escape* from the world and the truly awful things that happen on this earth, we will cut ourselves off from millions upon millions of suffering people, and that's not what Jesus would want us to do. We Christians are supposed to *engage* with the world, not *escape* from it. Somehow, we have to find a way to hold onto that tension. We need to be aware of what's going on in the world, we have to do whatever is in our power to try to *help*, but we can't be so *consumed* by the darkness that we lose sight of the *light*. There's a tension here ... but somewhere there's a *balance*.

My prayer today is that we will all, each of us, individually, find that balance. Be aware of what's going on. Do what is within your power to help. And *never, ever* lose sight of God's glory.

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