

***Glimpsing Glory***  
***Exodus 33:12-23***  
***18 October 2020***  
***sermon preached by Rev. Jessica McCrae***

I love this photograph by Scott Mutter. It is called “Church Aisle” and it is an unusual, creative image that evokes a reaction, positive or negative, by all who see it. It was created by superimposing two images into a single picture. One image is of a busy New York City street, the other an image of a European cathedral. When you looked at the image it appears that the busy New York street, with all of its buses, cars and taxis rush up and down the aisles of the empty, fully lit cathedral. It is a strong statement about the impact of the world upon our faith and our expression of our faith. For me, this piece of art reminds me that we can not shut the world out, nor are we called to shut the world out. Every time we enter these church doors we bring outside concerns with us, all of the stress, politics, frenzy and ideals that bind our society together; and we lay them at the feet of God. In return we are strengthened and nourished to face the world that awaits us outside these walls and share the message of good news that we have received.

This photograph speaks well of the impact of the world upon our faith. But for me it also speaks loudly of the place of God in our world, and our view of God from where we stand. Try to imagine, for just a moment if you can, what it would be like, sitting in your car driving along the aisle of the great cathedral. The road beneath you is like any road; you stop at stoplights, honk at the inconsiderate driver who takes your right of way, and look periodically in your rear view mirror, examining where you have been and who is approaching from behind. As you take your drive, whether it is leisurely or purposeful, you glance every now and then at the scenery outside your window. On either side of the street huge wooden structures rise up. They are the pews of the cathedral, but from where you stand they are just enormous structures, buildings of commerce maybe, medical facilities or giant shopping malls; to you they are just elements of the world in which you live. It is tough, from where you stand, to see them in any other way. It is particularly difficult to see them as part of God's world.

Isn't that the way it is with life? When we are in the midst of trials, tribulations or just the stuff of everyday life, it can be difficult to see past what is right in front of us, in order to see the bigger picture.

When we are focused on all that is wrong in our lives, what is stressful, difficult or even common place, it is sometimes difficult to see the hands of God all around us. Not because we lack faith or hope, but simply because we don't always have the best vantage point to see all of the love that surrounds us.

I'm sure you are feeling that today, in many ways. We don't always have the best vantage point right now to see the love of God surrounding us. It has been a really hard year, and it shows no hope of getting easier any time soon. We are burdened down by the news of our world, by the uncertainty around us and the fears we all carry about keeping one another safe and finding our way through this pandemic. It can be very easy to feel distanced from God as we put so much effort into just making it through each day. Just like this picture, if we are on the floor of that aisle, the things right in front of us, the traffic, the people, the noise is very obvious. But the bigger picture, the presence of the sacred, the divine, the embrace of God can be a little less obvious. In other words, from where we stand is can seem much easier to see the obstacles in our path than the presence of God surrounding us through this. It is easier to see the

darkness than the light. It is easier to spot where God used to be, rather than the arms of God surrounding us now.

Which is maybe why it is so easy to relate to the wilderness journey with the Israelites. So many times in this story the challenges the people are facing are so much more obvious to them, than the presence of God through their journey. The story of the Israelites wilderness journey is a story about suffering and struggle. But it is even more, a story about how God ever so patiently reveals God's presence to these people in little, and not so little ways. And today, after all that they had been through, after all that Moses had been through, he wanted God to reveal Godself in more than just little ways. He wanted something obvious, something undeniable. He was hungry for reassurance. And we can relate to that.

Like us, Moses has had a tough year and when we meet him today he is probably at his lowest, most frustrated points. The Israelites have broken with the covenant with God by worshipping a golden calf they constructed while Moses was busy up the mountain with God, planning the Israelites future. God is angry with the Israelites, the Israelites are losing faith in God and Moses is caught in the middle; a very underpaid and overworked mediator between a

hostile people and an angry God. Not a very enviable position to be in. No wonder Moses lays it on the line with God and begins to speak his mind.

He points out to God that he is at the end of his rope. Nothing is certain, not that it ever was, but now with God upset at the people it feels like all hope is lost. God wants him to lead the people, but how is he to do that, how is he to be a good leader when he is feeling so lost, so anxious, when he can't even trust that God will continue to be with them. The people are exhausted. They've seen so much pain, so much heartache. They just want to rest and forget their troubles for awhile. But God wants them to keep going. Toward what? What is the future going to hold?

And will they always feel so alone and so forgotten. Because from where Moses stands, he tells God, things aren't looking so great. So let me know that you love us, let me know that you forgive us. Give me a sign that we are not forgotten.

God thought for a moment and decided that Moses' words were fair enough, given the circumstances. "I will do just as you ask, Moses, because I know you and love you. I will go with you. I will forgive my people and love them as i love you."

At this point things were looking up and Moses, trying to see just how far he could push the envelope said, “Wonderful God, thank you. And please, while you are at it, let me see your glory.”

Let me see your glory. He probably took it a little too far with that request. But you can't blame him. Afterall, like us Moses is just human, and I don't know know about you but lately there have been a few times when I have been hungry to see the glory of God too amidst the mess that our world is becoming. We all need a sign now and then. Something that puts our mind at ease that God is here, and that God will be with us as we work our way through this predicament in which we've found ourselves.

God understood what Moses needed, and why he made the request, but unfortunately, God was just not able to fully comply. Afterall to see all of God, to see God's face, would kill Moses, it would just be too much. Too much love, I guess, if there can be such a thing. Too much power, too much glory, too much to comprehend, too ... different from what we know. You would think that looking upon the face of God would heal all ills and bring great joy. But maybe, looking upon such pure love and joy and beauty would burst our hearts, or break our hearts. Maybe it would shift our perspective

so much that we could not longer live, really live in this world, and this world is where we are meant to be right now. I don't know. But whatever the reason, we have to simply accept that, as humans in this life, we do not have the proper vantage point to see God in all God's glory and splendor. We just don't. But God can give us a glimpse.

And glimpse Moses got. Sheltered in the cleft of the rock God shielded Moses' delicate eyes, God protected him and covered him and held him as God had always done. When Moses eyes were opened he saw the back of God, going on ahead, forging a path for God's children to follow. Moses saw enough to know, God is here.

Moses took a deep breath and continued the journey.

We are afforded glimpses of God everyday. I can't tell you where exactly, because they are everywhere – in the expected and the unexpected. Your glimpses will be different from my glimpses, but they will be there, like the glint of light flashing off a building as you drive by, a little flash of hope, of peace, of reassurance, of love. When you need it, ask for it, just like Moses did, pray for it, lay your frustrations and your anxieties before God, be honest that you need some reassurance to continue this journey, to know you aren't alone.

And then wait, wait for your glimpse of glory, your glimpse of God streaking through your life, and leading the way.

Because you see, God is everywhere. And like that photo of the cathedral, rising up around the people, somewhat oblivious on the road, God is here, too. Surrounding us, protecting us and making Godself known to us, a little bit at a time. Having come to us in Jesus Christ, having chosen to walk this human road with us, God continues to come to us in the everyday stuff of life. Even here. Even now. Still. If you need your own reminder of that, as we all sometimes do, follow Moses' lead. Tell God you need a bit more courage, ask God to let you see God's glory, and God will focus your eyes, shift your perspective and I pray you too will then be able to climb down from the cleft of whatever rock you are sheltering and continue this journey knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is with us. We are not alone.

What a great comfort, particularly in these days.

Thanks be to God.