

Exodus 33:12-23

¹²Moses said to the LORD, “Look, you yourself have been telling me, ‘Lead this people up,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’” ¹³So now if I have found favor in your sight, please show me your ways, so that I may know you, so that I may find favor in your sight. Consider that this nation is your people.”

¹⁴The LORD said, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

¹⁵Moses said to him, “If your Presence is not going to go with me, do not send us up from here. ¹⁶After all, how would people know that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Isn’t it in this way: that you go with us, so that we are distinguished, I and your people, from all the people who are on the face of the earth?”

¹⁷The LORD said to Moses, “I will also do this thing that you have said, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.”

¹⁸Then Moses said, “Please show me your glory.”

¹⁹The LORD said, “I will make all my goodness pass in front of you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD in your presence. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy.” ²⁰He said, “You cannot see my face, for no human may see me and live.”

²¹The LORD also said, “Look, there is a place next to me, where you shall stand on the rock. ²²It will happen that, while my glory passes by, I will put you in a crevice in the rock. I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³Then I will take away my hand, and you will see my back. But my face will not be seen.”

Show Me

I.

“Show me.”

You’ve said it. I’ve said it. “Show me!” a child demands of the parent who assures her there is no monster under the bed. “Show me,” the husband says to his wife about a receipt, and the wife says it to her husband about the bank statement. We say “show me” even when we know we won’t really understand what we’re being shown, like when the doctor mentions test results, or when the mechanic says a part is broken.

Moses said it, too. Consider where he was when he asked God: “Show me.” The chapter before our First Reading tells all about it.

Days before Moses had finished his visit with God up on Mt. Sinai. He had received the tablets of the Covenant chiseled by God himself. He came down from the mountain to witness the Children of Israel dancing and singing around a golden calf, praising it as if it were the god who had brought the people out of Egypt. Before all the rock dust from the carved letters on the Tablets of Stone had been blown out of the grooves, Moses smashed the tablets in horror at what he saw.

The Lord’s response to what Moses witnessed was sobering. God said: “I will send an angel before you... ³ But I myself will not go up among you, because you are a stiff-necked people, and I would consume you on the way” (Exodus 33:2-3, EHV). Go on to the Promised Land. I’ll even send a representative, but go without me, personally.

In response, Moses took a tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from the people. He called it the Tent of Meeting. When Moses entered the Tent, a pillar of cloud came down at

the entrance to the Tent, and the Lord spoke with Moses. Whenever that happened: “All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the door of the tent, and all the people would rise up and worship, all of them at their own tent door” (Exodus 33:10, EHV). There, at the Tent of Meeting, was God’s presence. Standing at a distance because of their sin were the People of Israel.

Picture Moses walking to that Tent. He has led a couple million people out of Egypt, and they complained at every turn. He stood between them and God’s wrath—more than once—and he is worn out.

He goes into the Tent and prays: “Look, you yourself have been telling me, ‘Lead this people up,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me... ¹³So now if I have found favor in your sight, please show me your ways, so that I may know you” (Exodus 33:12-13, EHV).

Then, just a few verses later, he asks for the biggest thing of all: “Please show me your glory” (Exodus 33:18, EHV). Show me. It sounds like Moses is just tired. He wants something he can see. Show me.

Are you tired? I don’t mean something a nap would fix, I mean tired in your bones. Tired of the work that never ends. Tired of a body that’s starting to fail you. Tired of all the worry about your kids, your marriage, money. Tired of the news. Tired of a world that seems to be coming apart. Tired of the same disappointment year after year. So you say to God, in one way or another: “Show me. Show me you’re there. Show me that it’s going to be okay.”

Pastors get tired, just like Moses did. Tired of seeing people disappear from worship for weeks at a time, finding something else they put a higher priority on than coming to worship their Savior. Tired of seeing people abandon faith in Jesus they swore at their confirmation they would hold on tightly to for the rest of their lives. Tired of watching people treat the church like a fast-food menu, ordering the things they like and rejecting everything else God has to say. “Show me,” the pastor says to God, just like Moses. Pastors don’t have it all figured out any more than you do.

In today’s Second Reading Paul puts into words the deepest kind of tired. “I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not keep doing what I want. Instead, I do what I hate... ¹⁹So I fail to do the good I want to do. Instead, the evil I do not want to do, that is what I keep doing” (Romans 7:15, 19, EHV). Have you been there? You confess a sin on Sunday and you mean every word of it. But by Monday you’re doing it again. You are worn out; not from the world, but from yourself.

King David knew where rest should come from, but he knew he didn’t always have it. He said it in today’s Psalm of the Day: “My soul rests quietly in God alone” (Psalm 62:1, EHV). But a few verses later he says it as an imperative, as a command to himself: “My soul, rest quietly in God alone” (Psalm 62:5, EHV).

You don’t have to tell your soul to find rest when it already has it. David’s soul was restless. So are ours. We go looking for rest in the wrong places: in money, in what people think of us, in worldly things that don’t last. That kind of rest doesn’t hold.

So we come to the tent. We come tired and restless, and we say what Moses said: “Show me your glory.” And God answers: “You cannot see my face, for no human may see me and live” (Exodus 33:20, EHV).

II.

That sounds like a door slamming shut, doesn’t it? “Show me!” And the answer is: “No. You would die.”

But we can’t ignore the other things God said to Moses in these very verses. Before

Moses had ever asked to see anything, God had given him a promise: “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (Exodus 33:14, EHV). Rest. Rest for someone who was tired. Rest that Moses hadn’t earned by passing some test. Rest that came because God said so—and that was that.

God wasn’t finished with his answer to Moses’ request. “I will make all my goodness pass in front of you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD in your presence. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy” (Exodus 33:19, EHV). God’s glory isn’t lightning and a thunderous voice. It’s his goodness. It’s his Name: The Lord—the God of full and faithful love. It’s his grace. God’s glory isn’t something we can demand from him, or something we can earn.

Why can’t Moses see God’s face? Not because God is hiding something, but because he is holy. In another Psalm King David says: “For you are not a God who takes pleasure in evil. With you the wicked cannot dwell. ⁵The arrogant cannot stand before your eyes. You hate all evildoers. ⁶You put to death those who speak lies. The LORD is disgusted with bloodthirsty, deceitful men” (Psalm 5:4-6, EHV). We are not a little bit unholy. We are sinful through and through. It’s not that God is being stingy by not showing us his glory, we couldn’t survive it.

But God says something astonishing. “Look, there is a place next to me, where you shall stand on the rock. ²²It will happen that, while my glory passes by, I will put you in a crevice in the rock. I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³Then I will take away my hand, and you will see my back. But my face will not be seen” (Exodus 33:21-23, EHV). The very thing that would destroy Moses—God’s own holiness—is the thing God himself shields Moses from. God puts him in a crevice in the rock and covers him with his own hand.

Moses can’t stand in the glory, so God hides him.

III.

So what is the rock? David had an answer in today’s Psalm: “He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress” (Psalm 62:2, EHV). Rock and salvation are side by side. The Apostle Paul puts a name to this rock and salvation. Talking about Israel in the wilderness he says: “The spiritual rock that accompanied them... was Christ!” (1 Corinthians 10:4, EHV).

The place God told Moses to stand was in Jesus. And the crevice? Think of Calvary. Think of the One hung on the cross outside the city, outside the camp, the way Moses’ tent was. The holiness of God cannot look on sin. The Father’s anger and judgment over sin that should have fallen on us fell on him.

God the Father turned away from God the Son. “God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21, EHV). The Rock was split; it was struck. Jesus took the wrath meant for every sinner—for the sins of the people who danced around the golden calf and for every idol and sin you and I have committed.

And the hand that covers us? It’s the hand with a nail-mark in it.

Remember Paul’s distress over being unable to be the Christian he knew he ought to be? He finally said: “What a miserable wretch I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25, EHV). In one breath he is filled with misery and pleading for rescue, and in the next he gives thanks for the Rescuer. That’s the answer. Not “try harder.” Not “show yourself some grace.” Jesus Christ. Paul goes on in the next verse: “So then, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1, EHV). No condemnation for those who are hidden in the Rock.

In the Gospel for the day, Jesus says the words Moses heard long before in the Tent: “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28, EHV). The same God. Now he is standing in front of you and me beckoning: “Come!” The same God who said: “No human may see me and live” now says: “Come to me!” He can say it because he did what the Law can never do: he took God’s wrath on himself. That’s why his yoke is easy and his burden is light. He carried the heavy one already.

IV.

So where do you go when you’re tired? Where do you go when you’re saying: “Show me”?

Go where the Rock has promised to be.

When you are worn out by your own sin—the sin you keep repeating—come to Jesus in confession and hear his voice in the absolution: “I forgive you all your sins.” that isn’t the pastor speaking; it’s Jesus; and he doesn’t lie.

When you are worn out by the world, with all its noise and fear and bad news, come to his Word. Open it. Let him speak to you again and again...and again.

When you are tempted to say: “I need proof! Show me!” look to the cross and the empty tomb. He has already shown you. There is nothing more to show—and nothing more that needs to be done.

And when you are weary with the same old struggle Paul talked about, don’t take it to mean that the Rock has failed you. It means you are still in this world. Keep coming back to the One who holds you and hides your face in the cleft of the Rock. Come to his Supper, where he gives you his own body and blood—and his presence goes with you.

One day “Show me” will end. On that day there will be no pillar of cloud and no tent and no crevice. You cannot see him and live...yet. But on that day, you *will* see him, and you will live forever.

Until then, when you ask “Show me your glory,” his answer is to show you his grace, his Son, given and poured out for you. Go today in his peace. Amen.