

The one on whom our hearts rely

Exodus 33: 12-23; 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-10

The one on whom our hearts rely.

Who do you turn to when you are lost and alone? Who do you turn to when people are looking to you for hope and guidance? The Exodus story shares the real struggles of Moses to trust in God and what God has said. I have little doubt that during this journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, Moses has gone through a crisis of faith. Moses has probably felt that his call from God is being tested...constantly. Yet, Moses' resolve never seems to falter. He has a gritty determination – calling out God...saying, “Look, you got me into this...and you WILL get me out of this....I'm not going anywhere without you. We are in this together.”

Following the leadership journey of Moses in this liminal time provides me with hope and encouragement as a leader. There is an authenticity to Moses leadership. He has shown a great ability to be true to self and true to the faith community while remaining non-anxious and connected with God. His ego does not get in the way, even when faced by the grief and loss of the people who project their frustration, and doubt onto him. Over the past two months, we have heard the people time and time again lose faith, and blame God, and Moses. We have seen Aaron fall victim to ego, by creating the gold calf for the people to worship instead of continuing to have faith in God.

Which leads us to the scripture today. The people have broken their covenant with God. And still Moses does not lose faith. Moses is committed to the welfare of the people he leads, to the people that God has chosen to be in covenant with. And because of this commitment and faithfulness, God responds with

compassion. God responds to Moses with affirmation saying, "I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight. My presence will go with you and I will give you rest." What a gift! Yet Moses wants more assurance. He has been through this before...he has pleaded to God on behalf of the people in the past, followed by God acting in compassion. How will Moses...how will the people truly know that Moses has found favour in God's sight? It is not something that Moses will see face to face. But it is something that Moses will feel, will experience and will know in the core of his being as God's presence passes over him, as God's hand protects him. Sometimes in our struggles we fail to see what has been provided, we fail to notice and appreciate who is with us, walking with us, sitting with us, supporting us. We long to know the final outcome, to know that God is present and with us always. The struggles of Moses and the Israelites and the new covenant with God, provided the foundation upon which the Thessalonians now live out their faith. Moses did not see God face to face, but God sent Jesus to people of faith, who they were able to see face to face.

In the first letter to the Corinthians in one of the passages that we often associate with weddings the most, from chapter 13 verse 8- 14:1 says:

"Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts."

What Paul, Silvanus and Timothy proclaim in the letter to the Thessalonians today is what they see and are witnessing in this community is God's presence alive and well. The Holy Spirit is truly at work. They have come to recognize that God is active, empowering, encouraging, and persistent in the lives of those who have turned to God. This community has bonded. They have come together with a

common purpose. Paul proclaims, that the people of Thessalonica are living their lives in faith, imitating Christ, even in the face of persecution. He believes that they have received God's good news with joy which is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Paul says, "In every place your faith in God has become known." And for this we give God thanks!!

Last week, I posed the question: Will you RSVP to the God's invitation to come to the table, and to live your lives in faith? Will you put aside that which distracts you from turning to God, so that you will indeed see God face to face? Will you acknowledge that God knows you, and that God's presence is with you?

The gift is there for each one of us. When we turn to God, we live in faith, we live in hope, and we live in love. We will follow Moses' example and the example of the Thessalonians in abiding in God? We will remain faithful to God and to the covenant promise that we are in an intimate relationship with God, one of mutuality? The words of the Hymn "Abide with Me" come to mind in this moment.

"Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide;
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me."

How will tomorrow look if you accept that God knows you, and is with you always? How will your actions reflect this abiding love that God has given? When we settle into the presence of God, we will find peace, we will find comfort, we will find acceptance, and we will experience love. How can we not respond from a place of compassion?

These scriptures today come at a very crucial time. This is a time when we need to live in a **spirit of thanksgiving**, as we walk towards another winter, another time that we could find ourselves in more isolation. If we hold onto, and trust in God and God's promise to be with us always, and we focus our time together and apart in a stance and spirit of thanksgiving what will we find?

It has been suggested by Pastor Jill Y. Crainshaw, that living in a spirit of thanksgiving can: Motivate us toward greater communal intimacy, it can motivate us to forgive and seek forgiveness and it can motivate us to collaborative ministries that spin out treads of relational authenticity and depth.¹

This faith community has great passion, faith and commitment to living out the gospel with each other and in the world. We have seen the tenacity of the faith community in finding new ways to help people in need, while honouring and protecting the people we love. Like Paul, I see the Holy Spirit at work in our midst. Whether it is your willingness to ask the hard questions, to share your struggles, to name your feelings of guilt, the words and acts of kindness and love that are shared, we trust in God. We trust in God to show compassion, to help us heal, and to help us learn and grow and become the people that God has called us to be.

¹ Written by Jill Y. Crainshaw, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 4, p. 186.