

Sermon, St. David's Episcopal Church 10/22/2017, Exodus 33:12-23 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

Today we end our study of the book of Exodus, which we started back in August, with the tale of Shiphrah and Puah and their heroic efforts to save Hebrew babies. We've been through the burning bush, the parting of the Red Sea, the ten commandments and the golden calf; and lots of lots of complaining.

In today's reading, it's just Moses and God, kind of like it was back at that burning bush. You probably remember from last week that God was pretty hacked off about the whole golden calf fiasco; about the people breaking one of the Ten Commandments so spectacularly.

Today we have an intimate conversation, and we can see that Moses longs for God to stay close. God says, "my presence will go with you," but Moses answers, "How shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless *you* go with us?" Moses doesn't want God to send God's presence: Moses wants God with them on their journey. It's wonderful foreshadowing of Christ, Emmanuel, God with us.

Don't we all want God with us? Sometimes God feels far away and remote. Where is God, we wonder, when disasters and tragedies occur? Sometimes we even have trouble finding God in church. Why bother coming to church, if we can't find God here?

Not only does Moses want God to go with them: Moses says, show me your glory. Moses wants to *see* God, in all God's glory.

Do you want to see God? How do you go about looking for God? Do you find God here, in this place, St. David's?

Before God talks about God's glory, God talks to Moses about God's goodness. "I will make my goodness pass before you." Moses is looking for glory, but God first offers goodness.

That's one way I see God all over St. David's. Last weekend, we had two funerals, and I was overcome by the love not only for those who grieved their losses, but also by so many of you gathering together, even some who did not know the person who died. You helped those families, and your church family, to see God's goodness.

I also see God in people showing up to dig dirt for a place to pray, our labyrinth. It's been magical to be a part of this creation. It's also been sweaty. I hope more of you will join in this, because it shows God's goodness, in people pushing themselves and working hard to make something prayerful beautiful and new that will bless generations. As those of us who went to

the Invite Welcome Connect workshop yesterday in Williamsburg learned, labyrinths can even be tools for evangelism.

Last Sunday in our readings, the people of God wanted to see God tangibly, so they made a calf out of gold. That wasn't a good decision. In this week's reading, God tells Moses "I will make my goodness pass before you."

What is good?

When I hear that question, I always think of Micah 6:8:

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God."

One of the things I love about St. David's is that we are humble, compared to cathedrals, for example. Cathedrals are designed so that one is in awe when entering. The arches, the high ceilings. We don't have high ceilings here. We don't have a million-dollar pipe organ. But we do have beauty. Goodness. Kindness. We can see God's goodness in each other.

Our study of Exodus ends today, and we won't get all these wonderful Exodus readings in church for another three years. But we aren't ending our study with the end of the book; there are several more chapters. One bit we don't read about that strikes me this morning is that when Moses came down from Mount Sinai after this conversation, his face was shining and he didn't know it, because he had been speaking with God.

That's what we want to have happen to us, as Christians, worshipping Christ at St. David's. We want to encounter the living God, and have our faces shine, so that when we leave this place, people can see God in us, because we are shining.

Seeking God out, asking God to walk with us on our journey, embracing God's goodness: these are the ways to make God shine through us.

Think about Deacon Bill, for example. We can talk about him because he's not here. He's been away for two months and has another month to go. We miss Bill because he's funny and loving and has a great voice and is wise and kind; but also, because he shines with God. We can see God's goodness when we are around Deacon Bill.

Bill took God's goodness into death row at prisons here in Virginia, and embraced men who were facing death after committing terrible crimes. Bill shined for them, and brought light to a dark place. Then he would come out of there and talk to others about it, shining some more.

After God talked about God's goodness to Moses—I will make all my goodness pass before you—God then says, “but you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.”

Moses talked with God intimately in today's reading, but Moses can't fully know God. Moses can't even see God. No one can see God and live. Moses wanted to see God's glory, but God tells him that he will put Moses in a cleft in a rock when God passes by, so that Moses will be safe.

God's glory can't be fully revealed to us while we are alive. We won't know God fully in this life, despite coming here week after week, and seeing God's goodness in each other; being overwhelmed with love. Despite that, we can't fully experience God's glory or know God fully.

I want to make sure you grasp that. All the study and prayer in the world will not lead you to all the answers about God, because none of us can know God fully.

Be wary of anyone who claims to know answers about God. You all ask tough questions. Why did someone wonderful have to suffer so much, for example. That's a question that will haunt us forever. We can talk about it, and talking can be helpful; but no one has the answer. No one fully understands.

So, we can throw up our hands and say, well then, I'm just gonna go to IHOP on Sundays and skip church. That would be your loss, and I pray you won't do that; and if you try, you're probably going to get dogged by your St. David's family. Because it's not only about you, about a private conversation between you and God, like the conversation between Moses and God in today's reading.

We come together in this humble space to worship so that our faces will shine for *other* people. We are called to shine for people who skip church and just hang out at IHOP. We are called to shine for people who can't afford to go to IHOP, and are having to travel around from church to church with CARITAS to have a place to sleep at night. We are called to shine for people who can't afford a Thanksgiving meal unless we provide it for them with our CCHASM Thanksgiving bags.

How will you display God's goodness today? How will you shine for someone else?