

Reflections from a United Methodist Pastor

May 2, 2021

Lesson 9

God Declares Who God Is

Exodus 33:12-23; 34:5-8

When I read this week's focal passage, my heart and mind raced to John 1:14 where the Gospel writer tells us that the "Word became flesh and made his home among us." That assurance echoes what was revealed to Moses: God is going with us on life's journey.

When Moses pushed the point (Exodus 33:18) and asked God to allow him to see God, the Lord said, "I'll come by you, but you won't be able to check out my face." Bummer! Isn't seeing someone's face the way we think we can tell the most about someone? The coronavirus days of wearing masks have made it frustrating. Was that person smiling and joking when she made that comment? Was that man yawning while I explained something to him? Did that little boy have downturned lips when his mother told him that he would have to wait until Christmas to get a new baseball glove?

No, Moses would not be able to see God's face (verses 22-23). However, God told Moses what God's presence with him would be like: kind, compassionate (verse 19, CEB), gracious, merciful (verse 19, NRSV). Moses! Where kindness and compassion and grace and mercy show up, that is where God is!

I know a pastor who every week asks her congregation, "Where have you seen God since we were last together?" So far, no one has replied, "I had a vision and saw this old man with a beard who said he was Yahweh." No, the replies are: "A neighbor brought me soup when I was sick." "My grandson called me out of the blue just to check on me." "My teacher gave me another chance to take the exam after I told her that I had cheated on the first one."

Those in the Wesleyan tradition know that sometimes we do not know that we are instruments of God. We call it "prevenient grace," that grace of God that is at work in our lives (and the lives of others) even before we can name it. God's grace does not always look like an old man with a beard!

Where have you seen God at work since last week?

Prayer: As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Holy One, Giver of the grace of hope and purpose, open our eyes to see your good presence in the unfolding of daily life. Grant us to find meaning in the broken places as we find your healing touch.”

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