

Reflection by Christine Macleod for Sunday 18th October 2020.

Reading. Exodus Chapter 33 verses 12 – 23.

Moses said to the Lord, 'See you have said to me, "Bring up this people": 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 favour in my sight." Now if I have found favour in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favour in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.' He said, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.' And he said to him, 'If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I, and you people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.'

The Lord said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing you have asked: for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name.' Moses said: 'Show me your glory, I pray.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, "The Lord"; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But' he said, 'you cannot see my face, for no one shall see me and live.' And the Lord continued, 'See there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.'

Moses in this chapter is the leader of the people of Israel. He is leading as they leave Egypt and make their way towards the Promised Land. Moses experiences a theophany – a manifestation and appearance of God.

At times in our own lives we also gain a deeper understanding of God. We build our ideas about God based on assumptions. Sometimes when things happen in our lives these assumptions are challenged and tested. We sometimes ask God – "Why, why, why have my circumstances changed? Why, why, why are you asking me to do this, or to go through with this? The wise friend or those we take counsel with might invite us to explore our assumptions about God and to check out the validity of our ideas.

Let us explore the assumptions that Moses had about God and his relationship with God and how he was challenged in this moment of crises.

What was the crises? Moses had gone up Mount Sinai to receive the 10 commandments and had written them down on tablets of stone. While he was there, the people broke their covenant and loyalty to God, as they stayed to party and to worship a golden calf they had made. Moses came down from the mountain and shattered the tablets in disbelief and anger. Where to now? The

people he was leading had alienated themselves from God. Moses assumed that God would no longer accompany his people.

Moses was in a leadership crisis and emotionally upset. Returning recently to work, I found myself leading teams again. That meant I had to do the organisation's training for line management and leadership. This week we looked at emotional intelligence. The course leader said, "Each of us must develop the mature emotional intelligence skills required to better understand, empathise and negotiate with other people, otherwise success will elude us in our lives and in our careers". But, you may say that this is secular thought. However, we are asked as readers of scripture that each generation also reads in the context of their own context. So perhaps we can draw from this.

Moses needed to mature in his relationship with his maker. He was in full throttle and ready to negotiate. He seems to be angry, fearful, frustrated.

On a personal level he accuses God – "You have said to me – 'Bring up this people, but you have not let me know who you will send with me' It seems to me that Moses feels abandoned, and is finding it hard to handle himself, yet alone his relationship with God.

Moses is socially aware of his responsibilities. Moses assumes that God will abandon both him and his people, because of their behaviours and rejection of the covenant. It must have been hard for Moses because he had been away from the people when this happened, and he pleads for God's mercy and direction. Moses pleads, "God you have said 'I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight". Their relationship goes back a long way, and the nation is God's people.

But God, in the middle of Moses's rant makes it clear that Moses assumption is faulty. For God replies and Moses begins to realise the truth of God's promise. God says, "My presence will go with you and I will give you rest".

Often in the middle of turmoil in our own lives and in our church life we need to hear God say that to us and to give us assurance of God's presence in the storm. We need affirmation that our God will not abandon us and that we are part of the Christian family, as followers of Christ. For the Israelites at this time in their history the other nations would know that they were God's people, as God journeys with them.

Moses asks for a theophany. Indeed, much of the work is already done as Moses assumptions about God have changed already. God, on demand lets all God's goodness pass before Moses – or as much of it as Moses can take in.

Let us pause to think of times when we realise more deeply the goodness of God. In these beautiful moments do we take stock that no matter what our circumstances that our God is willing to accompany us. When we understand that our relationship with God grows deeper when we come clean with God and God comes clean with us. Maybe we cannot fully comprehend the love and goodness of God, but we can pray that God will open us up to receive as much of his love and goodness that we are ready and willing to see.

In an earlier chapter Moses asks who God is. God replies, "I Am WHO I Am." In this chapter God says something similar, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious".

Let us thank God that God is gracious with us.

Prayer.

Thankyou God, that you are gracious with us.

In our lives you allow us to change.

You come alongside us in all our ups and downs,
gently leading, lovingly tolerating our immaturity.

Understanding us, upholding us.

You allow us to explore our opinions, until we grow in the realisation of
God's goodness, God's love, God's sacrifice.

May our relationship with our God, through Christ grow

As much as we are able.

And may we too be able to claim God's promises

as we journey together and come to find fullness of life and rest in Christ.