

# Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Exodus 33:12-23

Pastor Randy Ott

## The Answer is: “God’s Word”

I imagine you are all familiar with the game Jeopardy—the show on T.V. where the answer comes and you have to give your answer in the form of a question. There are various categories that come along. In our text today, Moses comes with three different questions, but these questions wouldn’t make good answers in a Jeopardy category because the answer is always the same. It says teach me your ways that I may follow you, send your Presence along with us, and show me your glory. Each time God says, “*My Presence will go with you.*” His Presence is his glory and his Presence teaches us and his Presence guides us. For Moses the answer was, God will go with you.

We might wonder what the answer is for us. At times in our lives we might feel like God is distant from us. When we are facing hardship or difficulty, when there is loneliness or there is despair, we might wonder, where is God’s Presence? We might wonder how God is going to teach us so that we can get through some of these things. We see so many things in this world of sin that don’t seem to be glorious that we wonder where is God’s glory? We might look at what happened to Moses and say to ourselves, “I wish we could have some of that. I wish we could be in God’s Presence so that when we came out of the tent our face would glow like it did with Moses.”

This isn’t just a history lesson of how God was once active with his people in the past at the time of Moses. I think you and I can rightly say that the answer stays the same. God’s Presence is still with us. He teaches us and guides us and directs us in his Word and his glory is revealed to us today in his Word. The answer remains the same. The only thing that changes is that at times we look to the Word for the answer and sometimes we look in other places, don’t we?

But for Moses, these questions were burning because some very earth-shaking things had just happened. In the Chapters right before what we read from Exodus 33, Moses had been up on the mountain getting the tablets of the Ten Commandments from God and speaking with God. The people had already agreed to the Covenant and they said, “We will do everything the Lord our God says”. Then Moses was gone those forty days and forty nights and you remember how long their agreement to “do everything the Lord our God says” lasted? They got all the gold together and made that golden calf and started worshipping it because Moses was taking too long. Their patience had run thin. They wanted God’s Presence among them in a more visible way so they made a golden calf. So Moses came down and in his anger he threw down the tablets of stone and God has a thousand of the people who had done this killed. God then said to Moses, “You know what? I’ve had enough of these people. I’ve had enough of their always

turning away from me. Here is what I am going to do, Moses. Since you have found favor with me, I am going to destroy all these people, and I am going to raise up a nation from you, and I will lead those people, because I have had it with these guys. I've had it. That's enough."

Then Moses intercedes for the people and says, "These are the people you brought from Egypt. They are your people. They are not my people. They are your people." God says, "Okay, but I am not going to go with them because in my anger I will destroy them because they continually turn away from me. So I am going to send an angel that will lead them as you go to the Promised Land." But Moses in our text then says, "No, I don't want an angel. I need you. An angel isn't going to be good enough. We need your Presence, your protection, your guidance, your teaching, your glory. An angel is not going to do it." So when Moses says, "You haven't told me who is going to go with us", he isn't quite being honest with God but he is speaking in a way to implore God to "Go with us as we go to the Promised Land because we need you because we need to be taught." And teach them God did. They all learned what God's grace was as he gave them water from rocks and as he gave them bread that appeared out of nowhere so that they said, "What is it?", and called it manna. They saw how God was kind and merciful to them, yet they still fell away.

God's glory went with them. The fire by night and the cloud by day and yet they still fell away. God's glory was revealed in a special way to Moses. When he would go to that tent of meeting he would come out and he would have to put a veil over his face because his face was glowing and it scared the people. But at this point in time he had taken the tent of meeting outside of the camp because God would not come into the camp because God had been separated from the people. It was a very visual thing he was teaching them. "I'm not among you because of your sin." Moses intercedes and pleads and then God agrees.

You see all of that and you read about all that and you say, "I wish we had some of that." The closest thing you've ever had to someone glowing is when they looked down to read and that bald spot they have hits the light. That is the closest you are going to get to it on this side of heaven. You might say, "I want the other kind of glow. I want the evidence of God's Presence." People talk about finding God's Presence in different ways.

Did you ever have someone tell you, "I can go out and fish and spend my Sunday morning or Thursday night or whatever it might be in nature and experience the Presence of God. I don't need to go to a church to have the Presence of God." I'll grant them this—what can you learn about God from nature? You can learn that he is smart—look at how he MADE everything. You can learn he is powerful—look at THAT he made everything, all the things that we can't even do. Then that voice inside of you that he put in there tells you when you do something right or wrong, you know, your conscience—maybe while you are trying to convince yourself you are learning all you need to know about God on that lake, your conscience says, "Really I should be hearing his Word." That conscience is still speaking to you. So what can you learn from nature? You can learn God is smart, God is powerful and God doesn't like sin and then you have to be honest with yourself and say, "I'm a sinner". If this is all you learn about

God and if this is what you think is the most important thing to know about God and this is the Presence of God that you want in your life, how in the world do you sleep at night? God is strong, God is powerful, God hates sin, I'm a sinner, let's go to sleep. You can't sleep peacefully if that is all you know about God. If that is the only Presence of God that you walk in to, life is going to get frustrating pretty quick and you are going to start looking to other places for answers.

So how do you get the Presence of God? George Barna, a Christian researcher in our country, says the most certain way to experience the Presence of God in worship is to start with 30 minutes of singing songs of praise to God and then God's Presence or his Spirit will be felt among the people and people that are surveyed as they leave will say they have experienced the Presence of God.

God certainly has made us to appreciate and to use music because it touches our emotions, but when I base my experience of the Presence of God upon emotions, there is an inherent danger. One day I am up here, my emotions are sky high and I am excited and I am singing and this is wonderful and I can feel God's Spirit here. I feel it in myself. The next day I come to church after having chased the kids around the house and tried to get the shirt on the right way and it was the wrong way and then someone threw some peanut butter and toast on the back of the other kids' shirts and I am so frustrated and I am so angry and I am so bitter and as I am singing these praise hymns, I'm saying, "God, why didn't you give me better children? What is wrong with you?" The Presence of God is a little different if it is reliant upon my emotions, my emotional sense of being, where I am at that point in time. It is not certain. Because I am here, I'm there, I'm everywhere in my emotions. I'm sure at times you are too.

I don't want to base the certainty of God's Presence on my emotions because then God becomes a reflection of who I am, and I've seen myself close enough. I need something bigger and better than me.

Did you hear it this morning in worship? We talked about God's Presence once already, didn't we? We have come into God's Presence who created us to love and serve him as his dear children. We come into God's Presence, is he just here in this house, isn't he outside of it? What do we mean when we say we come into God's Presence here at worship? What is God present through? What does he come to us through? Is it prayer? Well in prayer we certainly speak to God, but if you have had any conversation where only one side is talking, it's not a great conversation, right? We can speak to God, but that is only us talking. God's Presence comes to us when he speaks to us, when he acts among us. He speaks to us and he acts among us and he teaches us and he guides us and he directs us through his Word and through his Sacraments—in these seemingly simple ways that a child can understand and yet at times we can't understand at all. God is present among us. A splash of water and the Word of God, and God washes away our sins. A sip of wine and a piece of unleavened bread, and God tells us we are forgiven. "You have received my very body and blood." Not just symbolized, but you are actually forgiven. And through his Word he speaks to us, he is present, he guides us, he directs us, he leads us and speaks to us about how vitally important it is to spend time with God's Word—not because we have to, but because this is where God himself is present. This is where he sets our hearts aglow with his

love and his forgiveness. This is at times where he humbles us and drops us to our knees as he shows us his law. He shows us how far short we have fallen. He shows us where we have chased after him in the wrong places and in other directions—when we have looked for answers in other people and other ideas instead of in God.

As he humbles us by showing us where we have went wrong, as he shows us that the law demands that the wages of sin is death and it strikes terror in our hearts, he then lifts us up with his Gospel. He says that Jesus came and IN OUR PLACE was perfect. He never sought God the Father in the wrong places. He always sought him first and foremost in our place because you and I don't. Because you and I don't, he lived and he died taking all of our sin to the cross so that we might be forgiven, so that we can enter into God's Presence not humbled and waiting sentencing to hell, but knowing that we are dearly loved by our heavenly Father. That is the nature of his Gospel.

So when we are looking for his Presence, when we are going through disappointment and heartaches and uncertainty and grief and sorrow and bitterness and anger, then flee to his Word and let his Presence teach you and let his Presence direct you and guide you because in his Word, you still find his glory. His glory that is not revealed simply in fire and a pillar of cloud or pillar of fire, but his glory is revealed in his Gospel, in his love for you, in his unconditional love for you and his unending love for you. Our God is an incredible God. We can meet him and know him better and see his glory more fully the more time we spend with his Word and with his Sacraments.

When we are told to read the Bible or you should read the Bible more, at times we want to say, "You don't have to tell me what to do." But we aren't motivated to do it because God has said you should. God has simply said to us, "You are forgiven." Out of love for him, why wouldn't you want to know him more and better and more fully? Why would you want to say, "I want to go some other place"? When we know who God is and what he has done for us, we want to be lead by him in his Word. We want him to build us up so that we can serve him more fully, because he lived and he died so that you and I don't ever have to worry about the glory of the Lord being withdrawn from us. In fact, you and I will get to do what Moses in our text was unable to do. You and I one day will get to see God in his full glory face to face. We won't have to be hidden in a crack and just see the back of his glory. But when he calls us out of this world to heaven, we will see him face to face and his full glory won't terrorize us. His full glory will be a thrill to us because he has made us his own through the life and death of Christ.