



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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August 13, 2006
10th Sunday after Pentecost
Exodus 24:3-11
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Exodus 24:3-11
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 84
Second Lesson: Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16
Gospel: John 6:1-15

See God, and Live!

Katie, did you ever say to Rick, "I'm not letting you out of the house looking like that?" Never? My wife says it all the time. When I get up and we are going to go out and I didn't really bother to wash my hair or anything and it is sticking every which direction and when it is a little longer she says, "You are not going in public like that with me." I say, "Okay, I'll walk farther away from you."

Sometimes we talk about how we are just a fright, we look a fright, and we don't want people to see us looking like that or things like that, right? But really, there is no one in the world that is going to see my hair sticking every which way and drop over dead—at least not because of my hair.

Yet in the Bible, God tells us that no one can see the face of God and live. A sinner in the presence of the Holy God cannot stand. His holiness, in our sinfulness, we would be overwhelmed and we could not live. That is what makes this section of Exodus 24 so interesting when you stop and read it and think about some of these things that God tells us. Because here we are told that they saw God. They ate and drank and they lived. So it makes you wonder how and why that happened and how does it still happen today.

That is what we want to think about—we want to see God and live and how that happens. It is really a privilege that comes from God as we see in the Words from Exodus. We want to also think about how that still happens today, because it does. You and I see God and we live even though, by all rights, as we said earlier, if God was fair, he would strike us dead.

The events that I read to you from Exodus 24 come from a time you are probably familiar with in the Bible. The Israelites a couple of months earlier had left Egypt after all those plagues, all that death, all that wailing and remember, as they left, the Egyptians gave them a lot of gold and various things and said, "That's it! Fine. Get out of here! We want you gone." They spent two months and got there to Mount Sinai. Moses had gone up on Mount Sinai. He had gotten from the Lord the ten commands. He had gotten from the Lord other instructions—this covenant that we read about. Then he came down off the mountain and he gave them to the people. And you heard in our reading, didn't you, the people's response? Probably with some of that gold the Egyptians had given them, they were bobbing their heads up and down, "Yes, we will do everything the Lord has said. You bet. We won't turn to the right or to the left. God has done all these great things for us. He has brought us out of Egypt. He has parted the

Red Sea. He has taken care of us. He has brought us here. You bet we are going to do everything the Lord God has said.” Then God had Moses ratify the covenant with the blood, built the altar as a symbol of God’s presence, put up the twelve piles of stones for the Twelve Tribes of Israel, and then he took some of the blood and sprinkled it on the altar. He put the rest in bowls. Then after the people again heard the Book of the Covenant, because Moses wrote down everything God had said to him, after they heard it again, the people said, “We will do everything the Lord God has said.” Then the blood got sprinkled on them. Then God said, “You and Nadab and Abihu” (who would be a part of the priesthood that would come a little bit later at Mount Sinai), then God said, “You guys come up” and they had that meal together. They saw God and lived and you might wonder how.

Was it because they said everything that God had said, they were going to do? Is that why God led them up there because of their good promises and their good intentions? Do you remember what happens a month and a half later? Right after this, Moses goes back up on the mountain and God talks to him again and God carves out those stones and before Moses got back down, do you remember those earrings that were bobbing as they said, “You bet. We are going to do it”? Do you remember what some of that gold became? It became a golden calf. The people bowed down and worshipped and it says they engaged in revelry. They had heard God say, “You shall not make for yourselves any graven images”—they made graven images. He said, “You shall not commit adultery”—they engaged in revelry which is a phrase that was used to depict pagan, sexual sins that they connected with worship of their pagan gods. They did all those things. When Moses gets back down, he asks Aaron, “What did you do?” He said, “They gave me the jewelry. I threw it in the fire and out popped this golden calf.” That is literally what he says.

Well, “we will do everything the Lord has said”—no they wouldn’t, no they didn’t, and God knew they wouldn’t and they didn’t and they couldn’t. So they didn’t go eat and live with God because they had made a big promise and they were going to keep that promise.

They also made sacrifices, right? What was it that God said they took? They sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. Was it because they gave something to the Lord, they did something for the Lord that God said, “Okay, you have done that for me. Now you can come eat with me because you have earned that right”? No. Those bulls had no magical powers to make them right in and of themselves. Those sacrifices only pointed ahead to the blood of the covenant that we will enjoy today—the new blood of the covenant. It pointed ahead to the blood that Jesus would shed that takes away sin. So it wasn’t that they had done something for God. It wasn’t that they had offered up the magical, mystery offering and God said, “That’s it. The door is open.” It wasn’t the word of the day that was spoken and God said, “Come on up.” The only reason they could eat with God, see God, and live was because that blood pointed ahead to the blood of Christ. It was all what God had done, nothing the people had done, that enabled them to come up on that mountain, sit down, look around, and go, “I don’t know how to describe this. Do you know how to describe this? It kind of looks like clear blue sapphire, does that sound good?” Don’t you just get that they are reaching for words to try to describe what they saw because sinful minds can’t comprehend a Holy God only if

he chooses to reveal only a portion of his glory. We are still left shaking our heads going, “He is so far above us and we are so far below him.”

They got to see God and live because God gave them that privilege. It wasn't anything they had done. It is the same thing for us today. We see God and live—not because we said we are going to be good people; not because we have given something to God; not because we have good intentions, good efforts, good results, or any of those things; we see God and live because God in his mercy sent his son to live in our place and die in our place. God in his mercy gave us the waters of baptism which clothed us with Christ's righteousness and washed away our sins. God gives us the body and the blood in, with and under the bread and the wine, the blood of the New Covenant, the covenant that says, “I have done it all. You are forgiven because I loved you when you were unlovable.” We see God and live in Word and Sacrament because God is a God of grace.

So you are thinking, “Okay Pastor. Tell me something new. I know that.” But think of how often we forget it. Think of how often we might think to ourselves, “God must surely love me more than some of the other people. I am here all the time. I do various things to help around the church and there are a lot of people that never show up at work days. They don't show up to clean. They don't show up to help. They don't show up at worship. So God must love me more.” Whenever we think that way, we are not seeing God and living by God's gift and his privilege that he has given to us. We are trying to do it by our own actions. It's not going to work.

It is a privilege that God gives us. It is not something that we do or earn even though sometimes the devil wants to make us think so because then he takes our eyes off of Christ. And if we aren't looking at Christ, we aren't going to live.

It's part of the reason we have a school, isn't it?—to help our children see God and live. It's why we are gathered together here. A portion of the reason we are gathered here today is because God has given us the gift of another teacher. We are going to install Katie. Katie's privilege that God gives to her is to point children to Jesus and say, “See God and live.” It sounds simple enough, right? It's what you have trained for. It's what you have prepared yourself for. It's what you have been doing.

But we have to remind ourselves what it is that we point the children to. Why is it that we have this school and some other very important questions. You can prepare your Christ Light lesson and teach your Christ Light lesson with enthusiasm and joy and being bubbly and engaging and not that dull monotone teacher that maybe you remember you grew up with, and you can think that you have done your part by pointing the kids to Jesus. That is true, but it is true only to a point, because we want the kids to see God and live all through the day, not just in the Christ Light lesson. There are temptations as you point the children to Jesus, and they are too busy looking at their belly button lint and when they are not paying attention to you, you are going to be tempted to maybe fall back into some other ways to motivate them to see God and live, to get them to do what is right. Quite often it is tempting to use the Law, isn't it?—to motivate them with the Law instead of the Gospel. If we do that, we are not doing what we learned today, that we see God and live not through the Law—the Law terrifies us,

the Law says, “I can’t do it.” We see God and live through the Gospel. So the hard thing, the more difficult thing is to continually encourage and build up children to see Christ with the Gospel instead of falling back on the easy thing of the Law—do this or else. You can get results with the Law, but you can’t get God-pleasing results with the Law. The Law didn’t save anyone, and it never will.

Not only do you get to have the children see God and live as you share God’s Word with them and as you motivate them with the Gospel, but you also get the children to see God, I suppose also you could say, in seeing you—not that you are God-like—not even to Rick. But they are going to see you living your faith and in that sense, they see God.

Part of the reason I am standing under a bunch of trees outside in a black gown today here in Morrison is because I saw Christ in one of the teachers I had. I had a teacher in kindergarten and in 4th-8th grade—the same teacher, Mrs. Helen Scoles. She taught me well. She was a good teacher and all that, but day after day after day I saw Christ in her. Humanly speaking, next to my parents, she is the single greatest reason I am a pastor standing here right now, because day after day I saw Christ in her. When I tried to get away with something, she didn’t get all over me all the time right away. She was kind and loving and patient and you could see Christ in her. That was an incredible blessing for me and the other students that were taught there. My prayer is that you can be that kind of blessing to our children here—that in you, they see God.

That is kind of a scary thought, isn’t it? People are going to look at you and see God? For Pete’s sake, you know yourself; you know you are not God-like. None of us are. But what God asks us to do, God equips us to do. When God asks you as a teacher or us as parents or us as Christians to help other people see God in ourselves, he tells us through Word and Sacrament, “I’m going to strengthen you. I am going to sustain you. I am going to enable you to do more than you could ask for or imagine.” The power is his. The work is his. The gifts that he gives are his. They don’t come from us. When we understand that and we rely on God, like Paul we can say, even though we have shortcomings, even though we have physical limitations or weaknesses, *For when I am weak, then I am strong* (2 Corinthians 12:10). God’s grace is sufficient and that is what we learn to rely on.

God’s grace is also what we need to rely on as we run a school. As parents and as a congregation here, what is it that you expect out of a new teacher or any of our teachers? Do you expect that at the end of the year, as we look at the test results and compare them to the beginning of the year, that they better be better and that then we have had a successful year? Or we look at all those standardized tests—do we want to look at those and say, “Our test results are above average. We are doing the job we are here for”? If that is where you are setting your goal, you are setting it way too low. Our goal isn’t just to provide quality education. Our goal is to provide quality Christian education—to bring children to see God and live, to know who God is and what he has done for them in spite of who they are. The more we do that, we want to touch lives so that these children learn to live as Christians in response to God’s love—not out of fear, not out of the Law, but out of the Gospel that God loved me and loved me enough to take away my sins even when I am such a terrible sinner that I see over and over and

over as I look at the mirror of the Law. And then to put that into practice in our lives in how we live and how we serve as we read in the Second Lesson—preparing God’s people for works of service—that we teach and train. That’s the whole purpose of the congregation also, isn’t it? Teach and train so that we use the gifts that God has given us to his glory for the right reason in the right way so that the kingdom of God grows among us. That is why we have the school. That is why we have the congregation.

As a congregation, maybe we ought to think about standardized testing and say, “Are we doing our job in those areas and not just numbers on a page from math and English and some of these other things. But how are we doing?” Maybe we should look at ourselves honestly and say, “Are we closer to God at this time this year than we were at this time last year?” Are we living our faith? Are there fruits of faith? Are we growing in the grace of giving and the grace of encouraging and the grace of showing leadership? Are we growing in sharing the Gospel? Are we growing in living everything to God’s glory? Are we growing in living, knowing that we have seen God and we still live?

That is what we are here for and that is why God gave us another teacher.