

“Bummed Out With God”

Exodus 33:7-12; 17-23

Remembrance Day

Last week, I was having lunch with a gentleman and we were sharing with one another how we whine and grumble in our lives. We asked one another if we thought we were becoming more grateful in our spirits as we grew older. Then we began to talk about theology and how God had entered into our lives and how our experiences with the Sacred had changed us. As we dove into one another's story, tears began to roll down the man's face and I sat with him in silence and reverence because the moment was holy and precious as we were both encountering the invisible immortal. While our fajitas continued to sizzle among the stirring of our hearts, I asked my friend, “What do you want to experience with God? What is the vision you have in your heart of being close to God? The gentleman found his voice and whispered through his tears, “I want to see Jesus and never be the same again.”

How do we want to experience God? What is the vision that each one of us hold in the secret places of our heart around our desire to have a rich and intimate marriage or a family life that doesn't involve riding on the roller coaster of trying to create a home where everyone shares the same definitions and ideals? What is our vision of who God is and how we want and need God to be with us? What is our vision for Living Spirit United Church?

The story we have in Exodus 33 speaks to an intimate relationship between Moses and Yahweh. Moses was the most unlikely to succeed as a minister to the grumbling nation of Israel. After all,

how was one man, with a support team around him that couldn't even hold the people together while he was receiving spiritual direction from God around how to live in community, how was Moses going to lead a nation of whiners to a land of milk and honey? And what if that land, that new place, wasn't going to be all the nation of Israel and Moses had dreamed about as they journeyed together?

There were a lot of "what if's" floating around in those desert days and those same "what if's" are among us today. But there was something else very present to the nation of Israel and that was how Moses and God related to one another. Our text tells us that the people witnessed Moses speaking with the Holy every day at the entrance of their traveling tabernacle. All the people could see was Moses with some sort of vapor around him as he spoke into the space as if he was talking face to face with a very close friend.

We know that Moses felt very close to God because he felt safe enough to remind God of all they had been through together. Moses spoke with the Holy about his memories and he shared his gratitude for their friendship as they experienced the roller coaster of the Exodus and the spiritual and physical nourishment they had exchanged through the desert. As I read and reread this text, my "ah hah" moment was the realization that God was also in the journey, loving Moses and the people, enjoying the times when they were able to be at peace, caught up in laughter and friendship. I realized that God also had a desire to be in relationship with Israel, with Moses and that the Holy has a divine vision of how he/she desires to experience loving and being loved in return.

We know that Moses and God were very close because Moses requests something and God bequeaths his request, but only

partially. Moses says, "Hey, God, I know we know each other pretty well because we have been through so much together. Our relationship has been close but bumpy from the beginning. We have loved one another like no other love I have ever experienced and we have fought with one another in holy warfare. We have been in foxholes together with Pharaoh's army on one side and the unknown horizon of the future on the other side and we worked together to find a new way journeying and being with one another. In fact God, and I'm not complaining but it hasn't been easy, this love relationship that we share and I've got the emotional and physical scars to prove it! But here I am and you are still the great I AM and here we are, committed to meeting with one another no matter what happens during our day so I think we're close enough that I can ask you something."

"Well Moses, what do you want?"

"I am kind of discouraged and I am more than tired of being the leader of these people who are constantly whining and wanting something different than what you have provided and what you have promised you will provide. So, if you could just show me what your vision is...what the promised land will look like...if you could just show me everything that you are and everything we will become as a nation in the future, I think I will be able to continue to be the man you have called me to be."

So God gave Moses a taste, a glimpse of His Divine nature and the nature of being in the presence of holy love. But what God did not give Moses was a crystal ball of all that would come to pass because he would not have been able to continue to become the person Israel needed to lead them forward. Why? What would be so terrible about God's chosen leaders getting a glimpse of what achieving our vision and mission would look like? And then another "ah hah" moment hit me. When the texts reads that God

said no one can see my face...all of who I am and all I have to give and then expect to live, I got it! God wasn't saying to Moses, "If I let you really see all of me you will die." God was saying the same thing to Moses that he was saying to my friend at lunch the other day...the same thing God is speaking to you and to me.

"Moses, Traci, friend, if you were able to see what was coming, you would no longer have any use for being in relationship with me. You would become proud of all that you would become before you had the opportunity to learn and grow into the vision you and I have of our relationship. If you could see all that must take place inside and outside of your heart for our vision and mission to take place, you would grow faint with fear and you would begin to suspect that the journey to becoming a person and a people who reflect my love would be too much of a roller coaster ride and you would doubt your ability to endure. Because I love you Moses, Traci, friend, I will show you bits and pieces of me and all that we can do together as I discern that you are ready to understand and digest what I reveal to you. So Moses, stand over there and close your eyes...trust me...and I will walk by...and when I say look now Moses, open your eyes and you will see and understand all that you need for this moment."

Well, we all know how that story unfolded. Moses played peek a boo with God up on a mountain and when God said "Look", all Moses saw was God's bum. And then, I suppose, Moses was bummed out because the next thing that happened was God handed out a "to do list" that Moses could never have envisioned if he had lived a million years.

We need to be careful around asking for what we believe we need to experience, because the character of our loving holy Friend is to give us what we need for the moment. And the answer to our "why's" around not being able to see or experience more of the

Holy now is simply *we're not ready*. We're not ready. And when we're not ready to do the inner work of being in relationship with God, we will certainly not be ready for the work of sustaining the ministries of the Spirit of God in our midst. Life is a roller coaster. It's up and down. It's fun and scary. It's extraordinarily happy and sad. And if all we wanted out of our relationships with one another and with God was to see how they were going to achieve in the long run, we wouldn't need to be with one another and that would be catastrophic, unlike any war human history has experienced. We are the chisels of the Holy in one another's lives and we are the love of the Holy in one another's lives and I hate to say it, but that looks a lot like a roller coaster to me. A chisel in one hand and love in the other! However, the chisel is not a weapon...it's our gifts. The chisel is our differences, our diversity and our various ways of expressing our spiritual gifts and personalities with one another.

After Moses was bummed out, God took him by the hand and said, "Come, walk with me and I will continue to walk with you and as we walk, I promise to continue revealing myself to you and we will grow into our vision of us together".

During WWII in Holland, a nine year old boy and his family hid in their cellar for months as the enemy flew all around them bombing their town. The family picked one outing each day to go relieve themselves in their garden. The boy would day dream of what he thought being rescued would look like. One day, the bombing stopped and the family began to hear footsteps outside in their garden. Then the family heard a knock on their cellar door. A voice followed the knock and asked, "Is anyone in there? Are you all alright?" The family knew that a German soldier would not be knocking or asking those questions so the father opened the door. A Canadian soldier was standing before them and the mother dipped their common cup into a bucket of water and

asked the soldier if he would like a drink. Afraid he might be being tricked, the soldier requested that the mother first drink from the cup. She did and then handed the cup to the thirsty young man and he drank all of its contents and asked if his comrade could also have some water. Another young Canadian appeared and as he reached for the water, the boy jumped out from behind his mother and said, "I knew you would be the ones that would rescue us and that you would bring chocolate!" His parents were shocked as the boy had never revealed his expectations and dreams of being rescued and to everyone's amazement, the second Canadian soldier pulled out a piece of chocolate from his pocket and handed it to the boy. The two became friends as they grew up with only ten years separated them in age.

We cannot imagine what the Promised Land and relationship with the Holy looks like and when we walk with God, as Moses did in this text, our expectations of our journey will be just as wonderful and holy as the soldier who came from a distant land and made a life changing difference in the heart and journey of a nine year old Dutch boy.

My friend at lunch wants to experience God in the personal story of Jesus and in the way Jesus loved people. I want to say to my friend, "When you are walking with your eyes and heart open to all that comes through imperfect people, especially people who are called to be leaders in the church, you will see Jesus. And yes, you will see Moses, and Elijah, and Hosea, and David and Deborah and Mary and Rahab and so much more". If we will open our eyes and our hearts to one another and not be afraid to feel the ups and downs of being in a human community of faith, we will see Jesus, and like the little boy in Holland when the Canadian soldier handed him a piece of chocolate, we will never be the same again. Our breakthrough moments are waiting for us and we will experience the "ah hah" when we are ready to be changed by the

presence of the loving chisel of the Holy. May we continue to be inward soldiers who are willing to run the race that is set before us, knowing we have a great cloud of witnesses who have gone before, making a way for us to live in freedom as they cheer us on saying, "We made it! And we're with God and God is still with you." D – Day...this is the D Day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen and amen continually.