

Year A, Proper 24
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Moses finds himself in a difficult spot- again. Last week we heard that while Moses was on Mt. Sinai, the people were rebelling and creating an idol, the infamous golden calf. ⁷ The LORD said to Moses, 'Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; ⁸ they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them' (Exodus 33:7-8). Notice that God says to Moses, "*Your people*". In the moment, it's the kind of thing that might take a backseat to the rebellion, but one can imagine the words stuck with Moses... "*Your people*".

After putting down the rebellion, Moses goes about leading the people. No doubt it was a very difficult task and took its toll. We can hear the strain in his plea to God, "Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is *your people*" (Exodus 33:13). So God give him not one sign but two.

First, God promises that he will be with them on the journey to the Promised Land. Second, Moses is given the privilege of glimpsing the Glory of the Lord, albeit his back and not his face. The take-home here is that Moses felt himself in a tight spot. He asked for and was given a sign of God's presence on the journey.

Isn't that what we pray for most days? God show me a sign that you're with me. Give me a glimpse, something on which to build hope. Moses received a sign and he carried on with his work and changed the world.

Compare the response of Moses to that of the Pharisees and Herodians who were trying to entrap Jesus with their question about taxes. They seemingly have Jesus boxed in. For if he says, "Yes" to the taxes then his religious message is hollowed out in an instant and he loses all credibility among the people. If he says, "No" to the message he could be charged with sedition and the movement might come to an end before its appointed time. Of course we know that Jesus gives the famous answer, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 21:21). Follow the response of the Pharisees and Herodians, "When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away" (Matt. 21:22).

In our weekly staff Bible Study this past Monday morning, Terri had a wonderful insight that has stuck with me all week. She rightly observed that the Pharisees and Herodians were amazed, but were they changed? We can surmise they were not changed for they did not relent in pursuing and ultimately facilitating the execution of Jesus.

Think about this; Moses, the man of God, the one who speaks to God regularly in conversational speech no less, asks for a sign from God and is changed. He goes about his

work. The descendants of Moses the Pharisees, the ones who should know better, also receive a sign- Jesus. There he is right before their eyes but they cannot see him.

So often we find ourselves in similar circumstances and we want a sign. God gives us signs but we fail to recognize divine markers. Why is that? Are we afraid to believe? Perhaps in our frenzied state and over-scheduled lives that we get caught up in Facebook or political allegiances to the point of obsession. When we do these things, there is not much energy left to appreciate the signs from God.

I'm often asked, particularly by young people, if God answers my prayers, and if so, how do I know. Only one time did have the kind of experience that Moses had today, to be in the presence of the Glory of the Lord. It's like a prolonged electrical shock but without the pain. The other way is in regular conversation. I'll be in conversation with someone and invariably they will bring up something that has been a part of my prayer life that I had not shared with them. When they begin to speak I hear the voice of God coming through the lips of my friend. The friend does not suddenly develop a divine baritone, but given my prayers, it's clear where the voice originates. That is every bit a sign to me and confirmation of God's full participation in a conversational prayer life. It may not be exactly like that of Moses, but it's a sign that God remains among us.

What we do with that sign is the difference between being amazed and changed. *Amen.*