

Last Sunday, a man came to me at Coffee Hour saying “Thank you. I got up this morning angry about war in the Middle East, war in Ukraine, fighting within our government, Terrorism, and the worship of GOD brought me back to what is important.” Immediately afterward, his partner said: “Thank you for fixing my husband! But here we are a week later, and life has have gotten worse! Do we take life as it comes as if THERE IS NO GOD, or believing every event is part of GOD’s PLAN and we have no influence? Is it possible to tell GOD how we feel, or do we fear GOD will get angry and give up on us? How do we turn circumstances around?

The definition of something being “SACRED, HOLY” is to be set apart, different from secular and worldly.

Moses had a relationship with GOD different than anyone else in history. Orphaned Moses, as a murderer had been hiding as a shepherd caring for his father-in-law’s flocks, when he encountered the Burning Bush; when he stood on Holy Ground; when he received a Name for GOD so sacred it was not to be spoken. Moses led the people from Slaves of Pharaoh, to freedom in the wilderness of Sinai. When GOD in thunder and lightning descended to the top of the mountain, people were afraid; and Moses went up to GOD. Moses received the 10 Commandments and Law from God, including how to build the Tabernacle where Moses would go in to talk with GOD. NOT until Jesus, does GOD speak of Emmanuel: GOD With US.

BUT, While Moses had been receiving the Commandments, the people had been crafting the Golden Calf. Like us, the People believed in GOD and were occasionally filled with doubts. Most of us are more comfortable talking about our faith, than talking about our doubts and uncertainty, but there is a bit of AGNOSTIC in each of us. Moses had been gone a long time, they were not even certain he was still alive having climbed Mount Sinai and disappeared into a cloud of thunder and lightning. While God is Immortal, Invisible, All Powerful and All Knowing, no one has ever seen GOD, so while the Cecil B. DeMille version had Dancing Girls and Bonfires, the Biblical version describes making the Calf as a representation of GOD to worship,... BUT in doing so they broke the first several of the Commandments, Worshipping other Gods and making Idols! Moses was so angry he smashed the Tablets, ground up the gold idol and made the sinners swallow it. Moses then goes to GOD, and GOD got angry. GOD says “You know, I had better relationship with Abraham, than with these people. I will make you the new Abraham and leave these people to die! In response, we have this morning’s passage: Would we call this a Confession, an Apology? Moses was a man with Chutzpah arguing with GOD for yet a deeper relationship, let me see you!

Instead of falling in the dirt before GOD, Moses demands to satisfy his Doubts, to SEE GOD FACE TO FACE. If he is going to lead this people through the wilderness, if he is going to lead them to the land Promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob what assurance does Moses have that GOD will come too?

There is a subtlety to this passage, in Hebrew, that does not carry over into English, because we have the same word “YOU” to represent singular, or to represent all of YOU. The LORD’s reply to Moses was “My Presence will go with You (Moses), I will give you (Moses) rest.” Which is why Moses comes back at God “HAVING GOD WITH US IS WHAT MAKES US WHO WE ARE, If your Presence does not go with US, do not send US up from here!

Part of what is at stake in this morning’s passage is What does it mean for these United States of America to be ONE NATION UNDER GOD? To claim to be a JUDEO-CHRISTIAN NATION? George Steiner wrote the book REAL PRESENCE, in which Steiner names that when Cultures have been without GOD, when they lived Objectively with no sense of GOD, that culture was unable to create Great Literature, Art, Music, Architecture, to have true and lasting relationships. This is the reason why at least WEEKLY we invite you to join in singing the GLORIA PATRI and the DOXOLOGY of PRAISE GOD FROM WHOM ALL BLESSINGS FLOW, we pray the LORD’s PRAYER and AFFIRM WHAT WE BELIEVE. AND GOD CHANGE GOD’S MIND!

At which Moses goes for broke, demanding to see GOD: "Show Me GLORY! REVEAL YOUR SELF TO ME." And GOD does, but not allowing Moses to see GOD's face. We cannot know where GOD is going or what GOD is doing, but we can witness where GOD has been! In Hebrew thought to see someone face to face would be to know them absolutely, to exhaust GOD's MYSTERY, to understand everything about GOD.

I used to perform a lot of weddings, and a testimony to faith, these 20 and 30 year olds committed to each other having known each other for several months or a year; in a few cases all of their lives, but that was adolescence and college and first job search. How much different to have couples who have known one another for 50, 60, 70 years. YET, even then, to still be able to be surprised by the other! As a congregation our Church has been here for 45 years, as a Nation we have existed for 247 years, GOD has been walking with humanity for thousands and thousands of years, AND YET GOD still surprises us, and because of FREE WILL, I believe we occasionally still surprise GOD.

Maybe the signs of GOD's presence are all around us, but we have forgotten how to see!

Abraham Maslowe wrote: "The great lesson from the True Mystics is that the Sacred is in the Ordinary! Sacred is to be found in one's daily life, in one's neighbors and family, in our own home!" GOD's GRACE, as seen by Moses, passes before us every day.

Karl Barth was a German Christian Theologian in the first half of the 20th Century who wrote a series of thick volumes writing in great detail about the love of GOD. Buried in Barth's CHURCH DOGMATICS is his own Confession:

"In Faith, we are forced to say that Knowledge of GOD begins with knowledge of the hiddenness of GOD."

We learn of GOD's GOODNESS & MERCY, because our Longing for GOD is not satisfied.

We have not LEARNED SO MUCH knowledge about GOD that we have no choice but to believe,...

We have been given enough that we choose TO believe.

The passage from Matthew also deals with seeing the image of GOD. This passage begins stating that the Pharisees and Supporters of King Herod (who was a puppet of the Roman Empire) tried to TRAP JESUS. This circumstance took place on the grounds of the Temple at Jerusalem. That is important because when you came to the Temple, you were supposed to divest yourself of everything WORDLY. The purpose of Money Changers was if you had not brought a Sacrifice they could sell you a Lamb, or Heifer, or Grain; and if you had any coins in your purse that you had not left at home, they could convert the money to Jewish Coins.

When asked about paying TAXES to CAESAR, among the many taxes they paid, they were referring to one Specific Tax, the ROMAN TAX which needed to be paid in ROMAN COIN, acknowledging that Israel was beaten by the ROMANS. Jesus says, "I do not have one of the ROMAN COINS, show me the COIN for paying Taxes to Caesar." And one of the Pharisees gives him a Roman Coin, meaning that HIS Allegiance was bought by the Roman Empire, NOT GOD!

Then he asks whose image is on the coin, and they say "CAESARS's" along with the INSCRIPTION:

"CAESAR IS the SON of AUGUST CAESAR WHO IS GOD."

Just like with the GOLD CALF, they have broken the first TWO COMMANDMENTS by Worshipping GODS other than GOD, and by OWNING an IDOL. Jesus then gives a wonderful summation:

"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to GOD what belongs to GOD"

Remember back to Genesis 1, where GOD creates Humanity, saying "LET US MAKE MAN IN OUR OWN IMAGE." Let GIVE OURSELVES TO GOD whom we SEE all around us!