

Sermon Title: Faith from a Rearview Mirror
Biblical Passage: Exodus 33:12-23, 1 Corinthians 13:12-13 (NRSV)
November 6, 2022

Passage Background and Summary

The passage for today takes place in the wilderness. The people of Israel have fled from slavery in Egypt and are on their way to the Promised Land, yet the people are growing weary in the wilderness and have been complaining. The scripture picks up with Moses approaching God to inquire into whether God is still with him. Moses tells God that God has called him, but God hasn't let him know who will be leading with him (v. 12). He asks God to "please show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight..." (v. 13). God responds, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (v. 14). Yet, Moses wants more assurance of God's presence. He says, "Please show me your glory" (v. 18). God agrees to allow Moses to see God's glory; however, he cannot see God's face and live (v. 20). God sends him to a rock where God will put him in the cleft of the rock and cover Moses' face with his (God's) hand until God has passed by so that Moses will only see God's back (v. 23).

1 Corinthians 13:12-13:

"¹²For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³And now faith, hope, and love remain, these three, and the greatest of these is love."

Sermon Points

When you make your way through Exodus, you get the sense of a people, and of a God, on the move. Exodus is a book about transition and change. We see a people on the move from slavery to freedom as they make their way through the wilderness to the Promised Land. While sometimes we think of the promises of God as something eschatological or something we'll receive once we pass away, the scripture speaks to the fulfillment of the promises of God in this present moment.

Nevertheless, reaching the Promised Land requires us to go through the wilderness or the liminal space. It takes a leap of faith to walk through the wilderness and leave a place of comfort and security. The people of God in the scripture are in this liminal space and are arguing with Moses and he's arguing with God because they miss the comfort and security of Egypt and are anxious and insecure in this space between Egypt and the Promised Land. Moses goes to God like, "I was comfortable in the palace, but you told me to lead these people. I need an assurance of your presence. If you're not going with us, we'll stay right here because I'd rather be here with God than somewhere without you, God. Whatever you do, God, don't take your presence away from me."

Are any of us honest enough to admit there's been a time in our life where we've argued with God? God, what are you doing? God, why did you bring me out here? Where are you, God? God, show me your glory! God, give me some evidence that you're still with me. Moses prays a bold prayer: "I'll do whatever you want me to do God, just go with me." Out of that prayer comes a moment where God says you want to see me? Sure. He tells Moses to go and stand on

a rock and he will place him in the cleft of the rock and cover his face with his hand. And while God does that, God will pass by and remove God's hand as God passes by so Moses can see him, but he can only see his back but not his face. God can stand with him and pass by him at the same time.

It's like going down a street and being passed by a car with bright lights, and you're like who is that? And you're not sure if they'll pass by or if there will be a head-on collision. After they pass, you recognize the back of the head or the license plate and realize that you know them. By the time you know what God is doing, God has already passed by and all you see is the bumper or the license plate. You thought you were about to have a head-on collision, but now you see God's license plate. God has been there working on your behalf all along. You can see God in the rearview mirror. We may not know what the future holds but we know who holds the future. We can rest knowing that we've done all that we can do, and God will do the rest. We can trust that God will work it all out. If you ever wonder if God is going to bring you out, look in the rearview mirror and see that God is at work. The same God that delivered you last time will deliver you this time. God is still God, and God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever been in the wilderness where you've left one place but haven't quite reached where God wants you to go? How did you feel there?
2. Have you ever wondered if God had left you? Explain.
3. Have you ever argued with God? What was it about? How did God respond?
4. How might we encounter God? What does it look like to see God's glory in our lives today?
5. Reflect on a time where you weren't sure what God was doing but God came through for you.
6. When you look in the rearview mirror of your life, what do you see? Share a testimony of a time God showed up and showed out for you.