

Pastor Writes

The theme for our morning's meditation is, 'True followers of Christ seek to live always in his presence.' What does the presence of God do to us and why should we seek to live in his presence? In the OT reading from the book of Exodus we see God's servant Moses seeking to live in God's presence as he brought the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt. The context is one where the people of Israel have experienced the mighty acts of God as they saw the ten plagues and as they walked between the parted seas and witnessed the death of the Egyptian soldiers washed ashore by the sea. At Mount Sinai they make a covenant with Yahweh and Moses is called up to the mountain to be with the Lord to receive his instructions.

A little after a month the people are irritated as Moses hasn't come back from the top of the mountain. The Israelites panic about their missing leader and turn to Aaron for help and leadership, asking him to establish national gods for them. They want a visible image of a god who will go ahead of them. Aaron acquiesces to their request and gets them to give their gold ornaments and makes them a golden calf. Aaron's idea may have been to use a common symbol of a deity in ancient West Asia. The bull was a symbol of divine strength, energy, fertility and leadership in the biblical world. It is Aaron's weak leadership which we witness when he says, 'I asked them for the gold, I threw it in the fire and out came this calf.'

As Moses comes down he sees that the people have rebelled against Yahweh in such a short time and in fact broken the first two commandments by worshiping another god and also having a graven image. Moses breaks the tablets of the Ten Commandments indicating a broken covenant. Moses then calls people who were on Yahweh's side and the Levites rally to him and they killed all those involved in idol worship. Moses then intercedes for the people and implores Yahweh to forgive the people who corrupted themselves. He even goes to the extent of asking God to blot out his name from God's book if he was going to destroy the people of Israel. However the Lord tells him that he will punish those who had sinned against him, but asks Moses to lead the people to the promised land and that an angel would accompany them.

Moses seeks continuous and deeper intimacy with God. He says, 'If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you.' Moses had indeed found favor with Yahweh because God had called him out of the burning bush to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. Exodus also records for us that the Lord spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend. It is this intimacy that Moses enjoyed with Yahweh; he now seeks deeper intimacy with God. He wants God to teach him his ways. 'Ways' and 'paths' in the OT refers to an ethical way of life walking in the right path, doing justice, and walking in the ways of truth.

Even as Moses seeks greater intimacy with God, Yahweh promises him saying 'my presence will go with you and I will give you rest.' Moses has persuaded Yahweh from refusing to come with him to a position where Yahweh promises his presence with them. There is also an additional promise and protection, bringing Israel to a peaceful residence in the promised land. The presence of God is what makes the difference in any situation. If God be for us who can be against us. As the people of God we are also called to seek a deeper intimacy with God. God's presence needs to be with us continuously and we need to practice this presence. Our lives will radically change when we begin to be conscious that Jesus is with us all the time. If he is with us, Will we be thinking the thoughts we think? Will we be doing the things we do? Will we be saying the things we say? The presence of God will change us radically.

Moses then pleads with the Lord that the presence of God was necessary for the identity of the people of Israel. Israel was unique only because of the presence of God. Moses is not satisfied with the presence of God promised to him as an individual. He intercedes for the people of Israel that they too may experience the presence of God. His prayer for his people is remarkable. Those who seek to live in the presence of God also seek that others may come to this knowledge of the presence of God. In the New Testament reading, Paul proclaims, 'for to me to live is Christ and die is gain.' His whole life was dependent on his intimacy with God. As we begin this year may be as true followers of Christ seek to live always in his presence and seek intimacy with him.

***Shalom
Paul Swarup***