

THE BACKSIDE OF GOD

October 18, 2020

Proper 24A

First Reading ~ *Exodus 33:12-23*

Moses said to our God, “Look, you have told me to lead this people, but you have never told me who you will send with me. You have said to me, ‘I know you by name,’ and ‘You have found favor with me.’ So if I have found favor with you, teach me your ways so that I might truly know you, and that I might find favor in your eyes. Remember that these people are the nation you have chosen as your own.”

Our God replied, “My Presence will go with you. I will give you rest. Let this set your mind at ease.”

Moses continued, “If your Presence does not come with us, do not send us from this place. How can it ever be known that we have found favor in your eyes – I, and your people – if you do not accompany us? It is your Presence alone that will mark us – I, and your people – from all others of the people on the earth.”

And Our God said to Moses, “As you have asked, I will do, for you have found favor in my eyes, and I have known you by name.” Then Moses said, “Please show me your glory!”

Our God said, “I will make all of my goodness pass before your eyes, and I will pronounce my Name, I AM, in your presence: I will show my grace to whom I will show my grace, and I will show my compassion to whom I will show my compassion. But you cannot see my face,” God continued. “No human can see my face and live.”

Then Our God said, “Look – here is a place beside me, where you can stand on a rock. When my glory passes you, I will place you in a cleft in the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. When I remove my hand you will see my back; but my face, you must not see.”

Second Reading ~ *In the Cleft, A Blessing* ~ adapted from Jan Richardson in “The Painted Prayer Book”

Believe me, I know how this blessing looks:
like it is leaving you, like it is walking away
while you stand there, feeling the press
of every sharp edge, every jagged corner
in this fearsome hollow
that holds you.

I know how hard it is to abide this blessing
when some part of it remains always hidden from view
even as it sees you from every angle,
inhabits your entire being,
and calls you by name.

I know the ache of vision that comes in such fragments,
the terrible wonder of glory that arrives
but only in glimpses.

I am not here to make excuses for this blessing,
for how it turns its face from us
when we need to see it most.

But I want to believe it will always find its way to us
when we are in the place
made by the crack, the cleft—
the space left
by what is torn apart.

I want to be unafraid
to turn toward this blessing,
this blessing that takes us apart
even as it makes us whole.