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In the Bible, conversations between God and people are central to how God is made known to us. There are many types of conversations — those about love, about anger, about thanksgiving, about prayerful requests. Some of the conversations are perplexing, like much of life. In today's readings, we have two conversations. One is between God and Moses and another between Jesus and the Pharisees. In each, people are seeking understanding.

Both conversations are filled with questions. A question is a valuable literary device, because a question requires an answer. Questions are also a way of engaging and creating relationships. Moses and the Pharisees use questions in quite different ways – Moses is vulnerable and the Pharisees are extremely tricky.

I admit I have deep affection for Moses. He talks in a very direct manner to God. I haven't quite summoned that style of conversation with God, but it is worth consideration.

Moses is curious. It is easier to be curious and open with someone you trust. Moses trusts God, deeply. And God trusts Moses. There are consequences in mutually trusting relationships. Over time, those who trust one another ask something of each other. In fact, it is in the asking and responding that trust is built or broken. Moses is trying to understand how to be in relationship with God. He is both assertive by posing questions and deferential because he is looking for answers from God.

The Pharisees are not affection garnering. But they serve a purpose. They are an opportunity for Jesus to express the difference between temporal and eternal life, what matters now and in the world – to - come. The discussion of the Pharisees with Jesus is not based on trust. For the Pharisees, Jesus is a contradiction. Jesus says things the Pharisees don't understand.

The Pharisees are using language to be controlling and manipulative. And Jesus knows the Pharisees are approaching him with expectations and guile. Not a condition for trust. When there is no trust, we cannot move forward. We are stuck.

We all have many conversations; some of these conversations are difficult. First, we are in conversation with ourselves. Some people talk to themselves, others ruminate, and some reflect.

There are also conversations where we talk with others, sometimes we are open and listening, other times we are closed and distrusting.

And then there are conversations we have with God. Now, we may think we are in conversation with God only when we pray. Prayer is not separate from life. Life is prayer. Every moment of our lives, we are engaged with God, in what we think, in what we feel, in how we act, and how we talk.

Today's readings about conversations are particularly timely. We are in a season of many conversations, dialogues, debates, and in some cases, pronouncements. And we will have to come down on one side or the other of these conversations; we have the opportunity to vote.

You may wonder, how did I get from Moses and the Pharisees to voting? There is a direct link — difficult conversations typically lead to decisions. Moses and the Pharisees were making decisions about how they would engage with God and with Jesus. So, in this season of difficult conversations, we too have to make decisions.

There have been times when I have cried in the ballot box. I am both deeply grateful for the hard-won right to vote, and, at times, deeply burdened by the decisions I must make.

I believe in the separation of church and state. I am not suggesting how each of us should vote, though I do hope each of us does vote. As Christians, we are God's believers, followers, and evangelists. God is in conversation with us wherever we are, including when we are voting. In the next few weeks, know that in the conversations and the decisions, God is with us.

Amen.