

Pastor Graham Pfeffer Sermon for 22nd October 2023

Text Exodus 33:12-23 ¹⁴ *The LORD replied, 'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.'* ¹⁵ *Then Moses said to him, 'If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.'* ¹⁶ *How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?'* ¹⁷ *And the LORD said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.'*

We learn from the bible that God is omnipresent. Which means that God is present everywhere. Omni meaning all, and present meaning God is with us. It's also what Immanuel means, doesn't it. God with us.

So, how do you know that God is present with you every day of your life as you go through trials and tribulations. How have you experienced the presence of God?

When we were in South Australia, I attended a shed men weekend where Pastor Peter Steicke and Ian 'Watto' Watson were the guest speakers. After a storm one afternoon, a group of us chatting over near the camping area marvelled at a rainbow which looked to arch over the shed where we ate, worshipped and had fellowship. We all exclaimed it being an assurance of God's presence.

Have you had any similar experiences where you have felt God's presence? What about in a time of suffering, how were you assured of God's presence?

Have you ever felt, how could God possibly still want to be present in my life? In Exodus 32 we see that God is deeply disappointed at how quickly the people sinned and made an idol in the shape of the golden calf to worship and bow down to. So, God said to Moses, leave me alone that my anger will burn against them and destroy them.

God tried to tell Moses these are your people, but Moses was having none of that! Moses pleaded with God, 'no God', remember these people are your people from your covenant to Abraham, Isaac and Israel. Notice that Moses uses Jacob's new name Israel after Jacob had wrestled with God. Israel being the father of the 12 sons who became the 12 tribes of Israel. In doing Moses is reminding God, these are your people.

Exodus 33: 1-3 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' ² I will send an angel before you...but I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.

Again, Moses pleads with God, as we heard today from verse 12, You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favour with me.' ¹³ If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favour with you. Remember that this nation is your people." If you are pleased with me teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favour in you. Remember this nation is your people. unless you go with us, what else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?

Moses insists to God that you must "go with us". Moses insists, I can't do this without you God. These people can't go forward without you. We need you. If your presence doesn't go with us, then we can't go into this land. We need to know that you are fully present with us. Don't send us up from here unless you go with us.

These are the words of assurance God gave to Moses, “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.”

Do you know who pleads for you to God on your behalf? *Hebrews 9:15* ¹⁵ *For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*

Just as God relented and chose to forgive, and have mercy on the rebellious Israelites, he continues to forgive and have mercy on us every time we follow after worldly treasure and those things that are more important to us than God. In all those times God could easily call us a stiff-necked people and want to destroy us, Jesus pleads to God, wait God, these are your people. I gave my life on the cross for their sins. This is what distinguishes them as your people and why you must continue to be present with your people.

With Moses, God met with Moses in a pillar of cloud at the entrance of what was called the tent of meeting. We are assured God meets with us as we worship with our focus being the altar. On the altar we have the word and sacraments, the means through which God comes to us and is present with us.

On the altar is the crucifix, reminding us that Jesus came into the world and was tempted as we are, yet did not sin. It is through Jesus that we can approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, to receive grace and mercy.

Yet we still don’t physically see God. So, what gives you the faith to believe as in 1 Peter 1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

How can we trust that His presence is not merely our imagination? The answer is, we believe in the truth of God’s word. Just as the Israelites saw God was present with them in the tent of meeting, and that word became flesh when Jesus came into the world, Jesus, when he ascended, sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts to assures us the God is with us always. Your body is a temple where the Holy Spirit lives.

Moses said to God, how will anyone know that you are pleased with me and your people unless you go with us? What will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?”

Something for us to consider as well, isn’t it? How will people know God is present with you as you go from here and that he is pleased with you? What is it that distinguishes you as one of God’s people? Do you always feel God is present? God’s continual presence does not mean you are free from troubles and hardships. God didn’t promise that. He did promise to be with you always. So, the question is not where is God in the hard times, but how is God present?

Is it simply the inner peace you feel even when the day is not going well? Or the strength to endure when you could easily give up. I pray that God does give you the assurance of his presence when you really need him to, like he did for Moses. May it be like a rainbow arching over a shed or something like that where you are assured of God saying to you, I have found favour with you. My presence will go with you and give you rest. Amen