

Exodus 33:12-13, 17-23

¹² Moses said to the LORD, “See, you say to me, ‘Bring up this people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’ ¹³ Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.”... ¹⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” ¹⁸ Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” ¹⁹ And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.” ²⁰ But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” ²¹ And the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, ²² and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”

Good morning, Church. Today is the third of the sermon series for the month of October, **“All Moses, All The Time.”** We began with the TEN COMMANDMENTS, focusing on the importance of a good foundation. Then last week we looked at how we have to grow in our faith as we read scripture – putting on our big boy or girl pants, and get past literalist reading of all scriptures – particularly where the writer uses the image of putting God into human form, as a symbol to portray the truth represented.

We have to look at our own personal situation, and then come to a realization of the influence our “tribe” has on our understanding, the same as it did on the one who wrote the original

words – before we are able to get to THE story, which transcends all personal and tribal intersections.

Today's Biblical account is a good illustration of these principles.

Here we have poor Moses – still trying to deal with the foibles of this young nation he has been appointed to lead. In our Upper Room group meeting this past Thursday, as we danced with another scripture arising from this 40 year sojourn in the wilderness, one of the participants said, "If I were Moses, I believe I would have turned to those people and just yelled, 'Shut up!'"

It was not an easy job and here we hear just a bit of Moses' frustration, as he vented with God. I'm reminded of the Memorial Service I preached yesterday for Garnett Pennington, where I noted that Garnett was gifted with the ability to think of a song that would fit into almost any and every situation. When I read Moses' vent in today's scripture, I am reminded of the 1968 Brenton Wood song, "Just Give Me Some Kind of Sign, Girl."

Poor, poor Moses.

- Rescued from almost certain destruction ordered for all Israelite boys by the Pharaoh of Egypt, and miraculously raised in Pharaoh's own palace
- Encountered a burning bush that was not consumed by the fire
- Given the power to perform miraculous signs before the Pharaoh in support of God's speaking through him to "let my people go"
- Ending with the great sign of the Passover of the angel of death which touched every family living in Egypt except the children of Israel who placed blood upon their doorpost
- The parting of the Red Sea
- The miraculous appearance of manna and quail to feed them in the wilderness
- The calling forth of water from a rock

All that, and here is poor, poor Moses: "Could you just give me some kind of sign, God, that I may see Your Glory?"

Really, Moses? Really?

So God decides that Moses needs to have an experience that happens in the ***cleft of the rock***.

It's a passage of scripture that inspired **Augustus Toplady** to pen the words found at page 361 in the Hymnal, "***Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me.***"

Toplady has his own ROCK interpretation. For him, he wants to "***hide himself***" in the rock – let me just experience Your Love, O God, and hide behind it.

For others, a ROCK is something that signifies strength and independence. (Can you hear Bob Seeger singing in the Chevrolet commercial that played on the airwaves during most of the past decade – "Like a ROCK"?)

For some folks, a ROCK is a hope for such stability that feelings will not interfere – the hope for a zombie-like existence, where one can process all life's circumstances without any emotions, like a Mr. Spock in Star Trek. (Can you hear Paul Simon's words from "I am a Rock" ?)

I have my books
And my poetry to protect me;
I am shielded in my armor,
Hiding in my room, safe within my womb.
I touch no one and no one touches me.
I am a rock,
I am an island.

And a rock feels no pain;
And an island never cries

Before we can get to **THE STORY**, we have to understand our own personal intersection.

The commonality I see in all these musical examples is the same thing that I saw in the symbolism of Moses' encounter with God – **the rock is something that we think will give us what we need. The rock is something that we think will help us, but which might indeed HOLD US BACK from moving on.**

- Moses was tired.
- Moses was asking God, “What have you done for me lately?”
- Moses was saying, “Am I really on the right track?”

What's YOUR rock today?

What are you CLINGING TO that you think will give you a solid rock on which to stand, but is really holding you back?

We each come to God in our own place. Is there is one thing that you need to offer up to God, to let go of, and to allow you

**To see God more clearly
Love God more dearly
Follow God more nearly, day by day**

Can you name the thing that is holding you back?

- Is it some fear of the future?
- Is it some weight of the past?
- Is it some decision, for which the right answer seems to elude you?
- Is there a healing that you desperately need?
- What is holding you back today in your living the abundant and eternal life that Jesus came for us to receive?

You each have a ROCK lightly glued to the inside of your bulletin. I'd like for you to peel it off right now. Then take a pencil, or pen, and write on YOUR ROCK **the name of the thing that is holding you back; the one thing that you wish God would empower you to release from your life.**

Do NOT write your name on it. Just write the name of the thing holding you back – the thing you would like to release to God.

Then, bring your rock up to the chancel rail. Members of the worship committee will be there to assist you – in tying your rock onto a string and letting it go – as we symbolically release what we want God to empower us to let go.

Would you come? [Helium balloons have been filled before worship, with strings and ornament hangers attached, to hook into the hole punched in each rock, to allow it to fly upward. When everyone has released their rock, the sermon continues.]

Recently I came across one more song. I'd actually encountered it a number of times in the past, but I had not paid attention. I Recently came across it in a book I read – the words of the song “Anthem” by Leonard Cohen, a Canadian poet, author, musician, and latter day spiritualist, who more recently spent several years in a monastery. I had previously seen, but not paid attention, to part of the song's refrain, which was the closing signature on emails sent out by Georgeann Lilly-Barker.

I don't know if Cohen based it on today's scripture, but he certainly could have. The refrain goes like this:

**Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering.
There is a crack in everything.
That's how the light gets in.**

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDTph7mer3I&feature=youtu.be>)

From Moses to Toplady. From Jesus' chosen apostles to today's disciples – we ALL have rocks that try to weigh us down. There is NO PERFECT OFFERING. There is NO PERFECT SINLESS life.

We ALL have our cracks. God knows that. And God uses the cracks in our lives in order to let God's Glory shine into and through us.

You are not broken. You may be cracked; but we ALL are.

There is NOTHING God wants more than to shine in and through you, that others may see THE LIGHT through your living.

I hope and pray that the release of the rock in your life, done symbolically today, may also be real, by the power of your Creator, Who has demonstrated throughout all of history His overwhelming desire to reconcile you to Himself, so that you may know in your heart -- and not just in your head -- that you are **A BELOVED CHILD OF GOD, PRECIOUS AND BEAUTIFUL TO BEHOLD.**

**Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering.
There is a crack in everything.
That's how the light gets in.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.