

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: You Will See My Back

Lesson: Exodus 33:12-23

¹² Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' ¹³ If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people."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."¹⁸ Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."¹⁹ And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."²¹ Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. ²² When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

Last summer, Evan and I attended the Hope Alive event in Amery. The event was hosted by several local churches. When we arrived, the place was already bustling with many people. One side had a band playing music, and people were lining up for hot dogs and hamburgers. The children seemed busy enjoying various games and activities.

(Slide 1) First, we grabbed some hot dogs and listened to the band's music while contemplating which activity to join. Among the various activities, there was one that caught my son's attention – the bounce house. He took my hand and led me towards it. There, he jumped, climbed, and slid down with other kids, having a great time. Since he was busy, I had a moment to relax.

Time passed, and he continued to bounce around with seemingly endless energy. He looked like he was sweating a lot, so I tried to get him to drink some water and take a break. However, he refused to drink water and seemed to prefer playing over anything else. I got worried and attempted to catch him and give him water when he came down from the slide, but despite my efforts, he managed to slip away into the inside of the bounce house.

So, I suggested going for ice cream instead because he really loved ice cream, but despite the idea of getting ice cream, he just kept on playing in the bounce house and didn't come out. So, I told him I would go get the ice cream for a moment and advised him to play with his friends. And, he said yes. There were other parents watching their kids, and since Evan enjoyed the bounce house so much, I left without much worry to get the ice cream.

The ice cream was provided by the First Lutheran Church. I briefly greeted Pastor Bryan, got the ice cream, and then returned to the bounce house. However, when I looked inside, I couldn't find Evan. I was really surprised and began looking around. In the distance, I heard a child crying. As I looked in that direction, I saw Evan crying, accompanied by two ladies. I was so surprised, and when I asked him why he was crying, he said he got scared when he couldn't see me and left the bounce house he loved so much to find me.

I was holding him close and thinking about how to comfort him. And then, I showed him the ice cream in my hands, and his tears quickly stopped. He smiled and grabbed the ice cream. After eating the ice cream on a chair with me, he happily returned to the bounce house and continued playing with lots of energy.

(Slide 2) Anxiety is a feeling many of us know well. Almost everyone has felt anxious at some point. Anxiety is like being worried and concerned about life. When we remember the past, we often think about happy times, but if we look closer, we'll see that we also had worries back then. When we were kids, we might have been anxious when our parents weren't around. As students, we worried about lots of homework, friends, and tests. After graduating, we were concerned about finding a job and later, about marriage. When we had kids, we fretted about their development. It seems like our worries grow as we get older, not the other way around.

But if we look at the Bible, it seems that the people of Israel were not so different from us. Through Moses, God led the people of Israel out of Egypt and even parted the Red Sea for them. When they were hungry, God provided them with manna, and when they were thirsty, He gave them water. God provided them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to

lead and protect them. Through Moses, God also gave the people the Ten Commandments.

All of these things were done by God, not Moses. Moses knew this well, which is why he constantly sought God's help. Moses had a mission to lead the people of Israel to the land of Canaan, but he knew it was impossible with his abilities alone. So, he went up to Mount Sinai to meet with God. He spent 40 days on Mount Sinai.

But from the viewpoint of the Israelite people, Moses seemed to be taking too much time to return. As days went by, they started feeling uneasy. People started spreading false rumors, saying that Moses had died on Mount Sinai or left them. Among the people of Israel, only Moses had truly trusted in God, so when he temporarily left them, they became filled with worry and concern.

(Slide 3) Moses' brother, Aaron, tried to calm the people and suggested waiting a little longer. But in the face of the people's anxiety, there was little he could do. To ease their worries and concerns, they thought they needed to do something. So, they decided to make a "Golden Calf," which represented wealth and success. They couldn't see God, but the Golden Calf was something visible that they could believe in, and it made them feel better. This Golden Calf became very important in their lives.

And after 40 days, Moses returned to them. He held in his hands the tablets of the covenant given by God. However, upon seeing the Israelites worshipping idols, Moses was deeply disappointed, and he threw the precious tablets down the mountain, shattering them. God, like Moses, was also greatly disappointed with the people of Israel. So, in Exodus 33:3, it is written, "Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you because you are a stiff-necked people, and I might destroy you on the way." God declared that He would no longer be with the Israelites.

Upon hearing these words from God, Moses' heart sank. He had no desire to lead the complaining, anxious, and idol-worshipping Israelites to the land of Canaan. The situation without God's presence was filled with anxiety and worry for Moses as well. Therefore, he decided to put everything aside and rely solely on God, turning to prayer.

Moses prayed really hard, asking God to guide him and give him grace as he moved forward. God answered his prayer and said He'd be with him. But Moses was still anxious, so he prayed again, saying, "Show me Your glory." Moses, just like the Israelites, wanted something real to know that God was there.

Friends, when we face difficulties, haven't we, like Moses, asked God to show us evidence of His presence, to reveal His glory, and to fill us with His grace? Hasn't there been a time when we requested God to demonstrate His presence to us?

(Slide 4) God recognized Moses' deep desire. So, instead of scolding him, God said these words: *"¹⁹ And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."²¹ Then the Lord said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. ²² When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.""*

Friends, we may ask to see God's face, but we might never actually see it. We can't see God's appearance or hear His voice directly. However, God has promised us that He will show us His back. God's back is revealed to us through His love, courage, faith, kindness, goodness, gentleness, the community of love, and the community of faith that He gives us. Through God's back, we will feel God's presence.

When we are in times of difficulty, feeling anxiety, worry, and concern, let us remember that God is with us always and that He shows us His back. May we all experience God's love and grace through God's back, and may our faith be confessed through His back. Amen.