

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran church – Watertown, WI  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Pentecost 7 – July 28<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011

### **Exodus 33:12-23**

**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.’ 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.”**

**The LORD replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”**

**Then Moses said to him, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. 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?”**

**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.”**

**Then Moses said, “Now show me your glory.”**

**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. But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.”**

**Then the LORD said, “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. 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. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.”**

Dear Children of God,

Who likes to be behind? Most of us would have to admit that we don't like to be behind. We don't want our favorite sporting team to be behind, we want them in first. We ourselves don't like to be behind in the final score of our sporting events. We don't want to be behind academically. We don't like to be behind someone at work who is moving out in front of us in productivity or promotions. We are a society that promotes being out in the lead or being first and we don't like to be behind.

Where are you in your relationship with God? It's an important question to ask ourselves? Do you spend time face to face with Jesus? Would you say that you walk with Jesus by your side? Or are you moving forward in your life, leaving God behind? All too often we seem to leave God behind or have seemed to have forgotten about him. We like to be in the lead, which means that God is behind. Today we learn that God needs to be out front and that God puts us behind him. He doesn't put us behind him because he's forgotten about us or is angry with us. He puts us behind himself to give us hope. Today our theme uses this picture of being behind:

### **Theme: God Puts Us Behind Him!**

- 1. We deserve to be behind him**
- 2. He puts us behind him to bring us hope**

Normally, we don't like being behind. As we said in the introduction, it's not good to be behind in your school work or to be behind at your job. No one wants to get behind on the bills. We don't want our teams behind in the standings. We're lost when behind watching a movie. We don't even like being behind our friends. By nature we don't want to be behind God either. Our sinful nature wants to lead, wants to tell God to follow us. We want to decide the direction of our lives and ask God to support us. We sometimes treat God like a genie in the bottle, expecting him to meet our demands upon request. And when God doesn't follow our lead, we abandon him.

That's what the Israelites of the Old Testament did. After 450 years of slavery in Egypt, God used Moses to deliver the Israelites. After the ten plagues, Pharaoh let God's people go. When the Egyptians pursued, God miraculously divided the waters of the Red Sea and Moses led the people across on dry ground while the Egyptians died. God provided water and manna and quail as Moses led the people to Mount Sinai. Then God called Moses up the mountain to give him the Ten Commandments and all the other laws for his people. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and nights. And as soon as the people thought that God stopped working for them, they abandoned God. They put the LORD behind them and worshipped a golden calf instead. As a result, God removed his presence from them. He said, **"I will not go with you because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way"** (Exodus 33:3).

Aren't we like the people of Israel? When God doesn't do what we want, we abandon him. There are many times and periods of our lives when we get so caught up in what we're doing that we forget God. It often starts during our high school and college years. We get wrapped up in our classes and extracurriculars that we don't have time for God. Then we grow up and want to get married with God's blessing so we plan a wedding at the Church. After the honeymoon we plan to get back into church but work and married life is really busy. When we have children, we bring them for baptism but it's hard to keep coming to church with little ones. Maybe we get reconnected when it's time for our children to come to Sunday school or catechism class. And then the cycle starts over again. It's not that we hate God or don't want him in our lives. We just don't want God in front of us all the time. We prefer that he stays in the background and comes out when called or when it seems important for us.

God should punish us as he threatened the Israelites. He should tell us, "Fine, if you don't want me in your life, or if you don't want me to be your God, then I'll go." God should abandon us. He should put us behind him forever. He should send us to hell and be done with us. Instead of putting us behind himself forever, God puts us behind himself to give us hope. Out of his mercy and compassion God shows us his glory from behind.

Moses was a great leader. He always put his people ahead of himself. And he always put God ahead of himself too. When the LORD announced that he would not go with his people Israel, Moses went to the LORD to plead for the people. We heard Moses' prayer to the LORD, and all Moses really wants is to be behind the LORD.

Notice how Moses doesn't claim anything for himself. He doesn't think he deserves anything from the LORD. He doesn't expect the LORD to meet his every demand. Rather, Moses reminds the LORD of the promises he made. **"LORD, you sent me to lead these people. You said you know me by name. You said I have favor with you. You said these are your people. Now, you have to keep your promises. If you don't go with us, it will look like everything you said is wrong. It will look like these aren't your people and that you don't know me and that we don't have your favor."**

Amazingly, the LORD told Moses that he would grant the request; he would go with Moses and his people Israel. The LORD would be true to his promises. He assured Moses that he did know him by name and Moses had found favor with him. Moses then asked to see the LORD's glory, **Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." 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."** I'm not sure what Moses was thinking. To give him the benefit of the doubt because God had commended him so highly, maybe Moses was just excited.

I can't give myself that much credit. I know that God has promised to be with me. I know he has promised to provide for me, to protect me, to deliver me from evil. I know that God has promised to lead me home to heaven. But sometimes, I want more. I want to see God's glory. I want proof of God's promises. Do you ever feel like that? Do you ever expect God to prove himself, to make his promises visible? Amazingly, though we have no right to ask and God has no reason to reward us, God grants the request.

The LORD told Moses that he would cause all of his goodness to pass in front of him, **"But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live. Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. 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. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my**

**back; but my face must not be seen.”** The LORD reminded Moses that he will show mercy and compassion according to his will, not our request. There was one restriction. Neither Moses nor any other human could see the LORD’s glory completely and live. So the LORD hid Moses in the cleft of a rock. He covered Moses with his hand and put Moses behind him. He showed Moses his back. He reassured Moses of his presence. He gave Moses hope from behind.

And God gives us hope from behind as well. In spite of our sin – demanding God to follow our lead, abandoning him through periods of life and expecting God to prove his promises – in spite of our sin, God shows us his glory. As long as we’re sinful people living in a sinful world, we cannot see all of God’s glory. But we see God’s glory from behind.

God shows us his glory in Jesus. The baby born in Bethlehem, wrapped in cloths and placed in a manger is Immanuel, God with us. God both shows us his glory and keeps his promise in Jesus. We watch that little baby grow up to live a holy life. We watch Jesus die on the cross for our sins. We witness Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven. When God shows us Jesus, he gives us hope – hope for the forgiveness of our sins, resurrection from the dead and eternal life in heaven.

God puts us behind and gives us hope by revealing his glory in his Word. Through his Word God reminds us of all his promises and reveals his faithfulness to keep them. God shows us his glory in baptism when he washes away our sins with water. God shows us his glory in Holy Communion when he gives us bread to eat and wine to drink for the assurance of our forgiveness. God even shows us his glory as we encourage one another in Christian love.

Where are you in your relationship with God? Our sinful nature wants to put God behind us. We want to lead our own lives and just call on God when we need him or when we want his blessing. We do not want to put God behind us. We want to see God in front of us to know he is with us and to remember his promises. We want God to lead us through this life and home to heaven. When we stand behind God, we have hope.