Green Pastures week of May 13-19_Fivefold Name of God_week 1

Monday, May 13

Moses' Big Ask

Today's Scripture reading: Exodus 33.18-23 (NLT)

READ

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 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.

This is God's Word

REFLECT

Show me your glory. Talk about a bold request.

More bold than Elisha's request of his mentor Elijah, "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit." Elijah said he was asking a "difficult thing."

More bold than James' and John's request of Jesus, "Grant that we may sit at your right and your left in your kingdom." Jesus said they had no idea what they were asking.

Moses asked, "Now, show me your glory." God said, "You can't handle my glory." At least not full in the face. At least not yet.

I suppose we can say that Elisha asked for power and James and John for position – but Moses seeks the very Person of God – the up close and personal reality of the very heart and nature of the God who creates and sustains and redeems and animates all things. That's essentially what "glory" in this context means: the weighty substance of the very heart, nature, and person of God.

That's not just a big ask – it's the Ultimate Ask. Often when we echo Moses' sentiment, "Show me your glory" we echo Elisha more than Moses, seeking the demonstration of power – or with less holy undertones Simon the Magician longing to possess it; or perhaps we echo Zebedee's sons more, seeking the position from which to wield the power – for the greater good of others, of course – thus echoing more the final temptation of Jesus in the wilderness when he was offered all the kingdoms of the world if only he would bow down and worship the diabolical.

But Moses' underlying motivation seems more personal than a pragmatic request as a means to an end. Moses' request is the ultimate end in itself – the end of the sixth "beatitude" or blessing of Jesus upon the pure in heart because they shall see God. Period. The very fact that they are the "pure in heart" speaks to the complete lack of ulterior, pragmatic motives of leveraging Presence for power or position. It's Presence for Presence's sake.

At least, this is what I'm inferring from the request before us – which request we're going to sit with for a day or two as we allow it to interrogate us just a bit before we dive into the full (for the moment) divine answer for the following five weeks as we mine the fivefold nature of God as revealed in this pivotal moment in the history of Israel and the world.

The question for each of us right now is, what do you want?

It's one of my favorite scenes in the film Field of Dreams. Ray Kinsella is walking with Terrence Mann through the baseball stadium and Ray asks the disillusioned author, "So what do you want?" Terrence snaps back, "I want people to stop looking to me for answers, begging for me to speak again, write again, be a leader; I want them to start thinking for themselves, and I want my privacy!" as Ray tells him, "No, I meant, 'What do you want?" as he motions to the concessions' stand. The reality is Terrence Mann wanted more than "a dog and a beer" and he ended up with more than he could imagine in that field of dreams in the middle of nowhere (aka Iowa).

This is the question for each of us.

"No, I mean, 'What do you want?""

If with Moses we're asking, "Right now show me your glory," what's driving that request?

So yes, let's sit with Moses and his big ask for a day or two. Let it interrogate you. Let it plum you.

RELATE

So, as we pause for a moment of personal reflection and prayer, ponder: So, how about it: What do you want? What does Moses' request, "Show me your glory" mean to you?

PRAY

Lord, let me not seek power – be it for ever so noble a cause, and let me seek not position – be it ever so selfless a reason.

Plum the depths of me and my motivations as we contemplate Moses' asking and your answer on that barren rock in the middle of nowhere; as I would seek your Face bask in your Presence and with Moses ask to "see your glory."

Tuesday, May 14

Backstory to Moses' Big Ask

Today's Scripture reading: Exodus 33.18-23 (NLT)

READ

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 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.

This is God's Word

REFLECT

So why is Moses in a cave?

Because that's where this story takes place. On a mountain in a cave – evidently in the midst of a raging storm. To understand that we must go back to Exodus 32 – but then to understand that we must back up to Exodus 19 – but then to understand that we must back up to Exodus 15, and then Exodus 12, and then all the way back to Exodus 1. Though to understand Exodus 1, we must go back to Genesis 12.

That's a lot of ground to cover. Might I suggest pausing this (if you can or when you can) and then going to BibleProject.com, clicking on "watch" and then finding the visual commentary on Exodus 34.6-7 that takes just over six minutes and that begins with a basic review of the Story up to Exodus 34, beginning with God's promise to Abraham to make of him a great nation that somehow would be instrumental in bringing divine blessing to all the tribes and peoples of the earth, through the enslavement of that people in Egypt, through their deliverance from that slavery by the hand of a deliverer named Moses through ten mighty plagues on the oppressive Egyptian regime, leading to a dramatic crossing of the Red Sea, followed by a two-month journey through the desert to the slopes of Mt. Sinai where God told the people to get ready because he was coming down to meet them. Three days later when God did come down on the mountain in the form of a frightful storm that made everyone fear leaving their tent door, God essentially proposed to them, they said yes, and then he spelled out through ten commandments that would ultimately be chiseled in stone and would essentially form the basis of their "marriage vows," with Moses then ascending the quaking mountain to meet God on behalf of the trembling people so he could receive the blueprint for building their honeymoon suite (aka the tabernacle).

Whew. That was a lot. I should have told you to buckle up. Deep breath.

While Moses is on the quaking, foreboding mountain receiving the divine download for that portable honeymoon suite and securing the stone tablets of their ten commandment marriage vows to keep in the heart of that portable honeymoon suite, the people below grew anxious and then restive. It had been nearly a month and all they had heard was a voice that initially terrified them from the mother-of-all-storms that still raged at the mountain top – into which storm Moses, their primary human support, had disappeared. So, they did what any of us would do – probably after three hours of such a raging storm: they went for the familiar.

They made a giant gold bull.

We no doubt would have settled for a soft pillow and Julie Andrews singing "These are a few of my favorite things," but they made a giant gold bull – because Middle Eastern imagery in whatever cultural expression, whether Egyptian or Canaanite, pictured the powers of the universe riding on the back of a huge bull – naming that power Apis in Egypt and Ba'al in Canaan. The text in Exodus and throughout the Hebrew Scriptures identifies this as a "calf" but we must understand this as insulting satire by the Hebrew storytellers as they essentially castrate the mighty bull (think the giant bull we have on display at Wallstreet) and reduce that powerful masculine image not just to a steer, but to a young female cow. Satire. Marvelous religious satire. No one sought refuge in a calf in a storm. Only the mighty bull on whose back rides the great storm god Ba'al or Apis would do. They just reimagined Ba'al and Apis as YHWH, standing astride the mighty bull clutching his thunderbolts as they sacrificed and then partied hardily to induce YHWH to move on their behalf. The trouble was that from YHWH'S perspective, this was like the bride sleeping with the best man or Maid of Honor before the ceremony was even finished.

YHWH not happy! He's ready to obliterate them on the spot, but Moses repeatedly intercedes and reasons with God, calming him down – until Moses goes down and sees it all for himself and then *he* wants to obliterate them. He obliterates the stone tablets instead, and then obliterates the bull, grinding it to powder, sprinkling it on their water supply and making everyone drink it like a galling communion that leaves three thousand people dead in its wake.

Some wedding ceremony this turned out to be.

Now Moses is back up on the mountain, trying to find a way forward through the mess. They had fabricated divine glory in a mighty golden bull when they couldn't deal with the intangibilities of this mysterious and dreadful YHWH. God assures Moses his true divine glory whom no one could manufacture or contrive or fabricate would go with them as they journeyed forward. Having seen and obliterated the phony, Moses now asks on that storm-tossed mountain, from inside a sheltering cave, to see that true Divine Glory.

And there is the backstory to Moses' Big Ask – and you just might recognize elements of it in your own, including your own version of a mighty rescuing bull.

RELATE

So, as we pause for a moment of personal reflection and prayer, ponder: What's your primary takeaway from this backstory in Exodus? Where in it might you see parallels to your own story?

PRAY

Lord, as with Moses in the cave let me turn from every attempted fabrication of your glory as you grind it all into dust, and through the storm, let me patiently await your appearing...

Wednesday, May 15

My Back but not my Face

Today's Scripture reading: Exodus 33.18-23 (NLT)

READ

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 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.

This is God's Word

REFLECT

"Show me your glory!" cries Moses. He's seen the fabricated and has demolished it. Now he wants to see the substance – the divine substance of YHWH.

Yes, that's one big ask. Too big, says God. Like Jack Nicholson in *A Few God Men*, God thunders "You can't handle the truth!" At least not full-frontal exposure to it. At least not the full Face of YHWH, the full face of Me. I'll pass by, and as I do, I'll cover the mouth of the cave with my hand until I've passed, and then you can see my backside.

All of which leaves us who in the fuller revelation of Jesus understand that God is spirit and not a flesh-and-blood being in a bit of a quandary – for here we have a Face and a Hand and a Backside. I'll leave you to wrestle with that one.

What I would draw out as a key takeaway from this moment before we move on to consider the substance of this "backside glory" is just that – that the revelation of God on Sinai and on through the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures is, in fact, backside glory. Though many in the assorted narratives of the Hebrew Scriptures testify to catching a glimpse of the "face of God" and living to tell the tale, no one full-on saw the Face.

All Old Testament revelation is backside revelation.

Keep that in mind as you navigate the many thorny theological and philosophical questions raised by these Old Testament narratives. Whatever light is shed is backside light – it's the light of dark side of the moon.

Or as I'll often put it when expounding on the Hebrew Bible, that glorious as this all may be, and crucial as this all is on a foundational level of grasping the Bible and its message as a whole, we're still just looking at God's backside.

It's still God just mooning us.

It's a bit crass, but you get the point. This is limited light, limited revelation, limited disclosure that's still enough to make our faces glow with the glory of it – but that glory is still limited, and it still fades. So, no matter how foundational the story, it's still not the ultimate defining view.

In Moses we have the backside. In Jesus we have the Face.

That's how John put it in his prologue to the story of Jesus:

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out. true from start to finish. We all live off his generous abundance, gift after gift after gift. We got the basics from Moses, and then this exuberant giving and receiving, This endless knowing and understandingall this came through Jesus, the Messiah. No one has ever seen God, not so much as a glimpse. This one-of-a-kind God-Expression, who exists at the very heart of the Father, has made him plain as day. (John 1.14, 16-18)

In Moses (and the prophets) we have the backside. In Jesus we have the Face.

There's our takeaway. Which doesn't mean we can flippantly do the pass over with Exodus 34 – we're actually spending five weeks here. It just means that Jesus becomes our tangible reference point for everything that Moses saw as God passed him by.

RELATE

So, as we pause for a moment of personal reflection and prayer, ponder: "In Moses we have the backside; in Jesus we have the Face." How often do you feel, even with Jesus now, you're still just looking at God's backside? How do we get to the Face?

PRAY

Lord,

with Moses in the cave let me turn from every attempted fabrication of your glory as you grind it all into dust, and through the storm, let me patiently await the appearing of your Face.

let me patiently await the appearing of your Face...

Thursday, May 16

He whose Name must not be spoken

Today's Scripture reading: Exodus 3.13-14 (IB)

READ

"But," Moses said, "when I go to the children of Israel and say to them,

'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,'

if they ask me, 'What is this god's name?' what am I to tell them?"

God replied, "*Eyeh asher Eyeh*. I AM AS I AM. This is what you will tell the Israelites:

'Eyeh – I AM has sent me to you.'"

This is God's word.

REFLECT

The Tetragrammaton. The ultimate four-letter-word.

And no one knows how to say it.

Some rabbis say that it's essentially the sound of our breathing – inhale, exhale.

Which means that every time we breathe, we are confessing the Name – even with those breaths we use to curse or scream or shout our angsty defiance at God. The first breath we breathe when we're born is confessing the Name; the last breath we breathe when we die is confessing the Name. And every breath in between.

I've always liked that. Along with the fact that when we slow ourselves down to consciously take a deep breath in the midst of breathless hurry and worry, what are we doing but slowing ourselves down to take in deep drags of the Divine?

This also would explain our inability to pronounce this four-letter-word – or if we once knew how to pronounce it why we don't anymore. How do you pronounce breath? Inhaling, exhaling, flowing, rhythmic breath?

This isn't so much the Name that must not be spoken but the Name that can't be spoken – only felt and experienced every time we breathe.

"What do I tell them when they ask me your name?" pleads Moses in one of a handful of reasons why he shouldn't be the one to go as deliverer of the people. "I don't even know your name so how can I go represent you?"

We, of course, fill in the blank for Moses. "Duh, it's Jehovah. Or Yahweh. Or Yahveh. Or with our modern Jewish brothers and sisters, HaShem or "the Name" or "Adonai" or even "G-D." Or in our English Bibles "LORD" in all caps. Or just YHWH. That's probably my favorite, at least in print. It gives everyone the option of saying any of the above. Or of just inhaling and exhaling. But then sometimes I just like to enunciate those four Hebrew letters: *yod-hey-vav-hey*.

Yod-hey-vav-hey seems to be derived from the longer answer God gave Moses when he asked his name: *Eyeh asher Eyeh* – I AM as I AM or I AM that I AM, or equally possible, I WILL BE what I WILL BE. I like that rendering as much as I do inhaling and exhaling, for the simple reason it removes the Divine from a fixed box within a closed system and makes the Divine as infinite and expanding as the very Universe God has created.

Which is something I can't wrap my head around – which is the point. If you can wrap your head around it, it's not God. It's not YHWH. It you can wrap your head around it, then you can also measure it, package it, make it, manufacture it – which means we're back to that big golden bull. That's the trouble with idols – and it also explains our hard-to-resist propensity for making them. With an idol we have an object that we can fully define and configure, and what we can fully define and configure we can manipulate and use – like a big golden bull. Or a gold covered ark. Which is what Israel attempted to do as well with that ark – which is no doubt why the ark is lost to history (sorry, Indiana Jones).

This is why God says, *Eyeh asher eyeh*. "I will be what I will be." Just tell them, *Eyeh* sent you. The One who cannot be confined, defined, boxed, reduced, shrunk, packaged and transported. *Eyeh* is as expansive and comprehensive as reality itself. The "heaven of heavens" cannot contain or limit *Eyeh asher eyeh*, *yod-hey-vav-hey*.

All of which doesn't mean there's no use trying to describe God or the divine – for *Eyeh* does just that after covering Moses in the cave as *Eyeh* passed by, utilizing five key Hebrew brushstrokes that while not even beginning to exhaust the reality of *Eyeh*, at least give us a starting point on this backside of the Divine – a starting point ultimately leading us to the Face of the Divine in the face of Jesus, the Word made flesh – who yet remains *Eyeh asher eyeh* as even now we still see him only through a glass darkly...but then face to Face.

RELATE

So, as we pause for a moment of personal reflection and prayer, ponder: How often do you think of God, the Divine, as being as close to you and as simple to "confess" as breathing? How often do you slow down to deeply inhale God? What does this look like for you?

PRAY

Lord, grant that I may learn to slow down to pause amid breathless days so I may deliberately, mindfully, soulfully, deeply breathe in the reality of You knowing that in each breathe I take I am confessing your Name that must not be spoken but only experienced and felt...

Friday, May 17 God's Big Reveal

Today's Scripture reading: Exodus 34.4-7 (MSG & BPT)

READ

He got up early in the morning and climbed Mount Sinai as God had commanded him, carrying the two tablets of stone. GOD descended in the cloud and took up his position there beside him and called out the Name, GOD.

GOD passed in front of him and called out,

YHWH, YHWH, a God **compassionate** and **gracious slow to anger** overflowing with **loyal-love** and **faithfulness**.

He maintains loyal-love for thousands forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet he won't declare innocent the guilty he will bring the iniquities of the fathers upon the children and grandchildren to the third and the fourth.

This is God's word.

REFLECT

"Show me your glory," cries Moses.

"Climb up the mountain alone – and bring two blank tablets with you," replies God.

God said he would pass by and cover the mouth of the cave with his hand. And so he does.

This is finally the moment of God's Big Reveal in answer to Moses' big ask.

Like Roy Neary in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* climbing Devil's Tower in Wyoming for this ultimate close encounter with visiting aliens, Moses once again ascends, this time for a personal visitation of the Glory. Even if it was just the backside of it. Only Moses doesn't end up stepping into a divine chariot, accompanied by a host of angels, where he is then surrounded by a spectacular alien light show. In fact, no attention is called to anything he sees.

It's what he hears.

God took his position beside him and called out the Name.

But he doesn't dramatically proclaim *Eyeh asher eyeh* or even *yod-hey-vav-hey*.

He instead utters two fully-loaded, descriptive-heavy lines that in this backside moment serve to spotlight the Glory. Here the ancient rabbis quantified what they called the Thirteen Attributes:

- 1. YHWH I am God before you sin
- 2. YHWH I am God after you sin
- 3. *El (God)* All powerful
- 4. Rahum Compassionate
- 5. *VeHanun* Gracious
- 6. *Erekh aphayim* Slow to anger
- 7. VeRav Hesed Abounding in loyal love
- 8. Ve'emet and in Truth
- 9. Notzer hesed la'alafim Maintaining loyal love for thousands
- 10. Nosei avon Forgiving premeditated sins
- 11. Vafesha sins committed in rebellion
- 12. Va'hata'ah sins done by mistake
- 13. Venakeh acquitting the guilty

Thirteen divine attributes derived from two lines of thirty-two Hebrew words.

That's the glory – or more specifically the backside of the divine glory. Though we'll condense the thirteen to a more manageable and portable five, leaving us with the fivefold name of God – which we'll reserve for tomorrow.

For now, let's close for today pondering how thirteen attributes may be condensed into five, and that those five are ultimately realized in the face of one man, the Ultimate Man – the "Word that was made flesh and dwelt among us."

RELATE

So, as we pause for a moment of personal reflection and prayer, ponder:

If you had to choose thirteen attributes – or even just five – to summarize the nature of God, what would they be, and why?

PRAY

Lord, let me not seek power – be it for ever so noble a cause, and let me seek not position – be it ever so selfless a reason.

Plum the depths of me and my motivations as we contemplate Moses' asking and your answer on that barren rock in the middle of nowhere; as I would seek your Face bask in your Presence and with Moses ask to "see your glory."

Saturday, May 18 Speaking the Fivefold Name

Today's Scripture reading: Exodus 34.6-7 (PBT*)

READ

YHWH, YHWH, a God **compassionate** and **gracious slow to anger** overflowing with **loyal-love** and **faithfulness**.

He maintains loyal-love for thousands forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet he won't declare innocent the guilty he will bring the iniquities of the fathers upon the children and grandchildren to the third and the fourth.

* Bible Project Translation

This is God's word.

REFLECT

yod-hey-vav-hey yod-hey-vav-hey el-roch-hoom veh-cha-noon ehrek-aph-fai-yeem veh-rav-chesed veh-emet

Welcome to the "John 3.16" passage of the Hebrew Bible somewhat as it sounds in Hebrew. From sporting events to bumper stickers, John 3.16 is everywhere. So is Exodus 34.6-7. This "Show me your glory" moment of Moses' big ask subsequently became the go-to reference point for countless subsequent references in the Hebrew Bible when the character and nature of God was brought up or called into question. Well, actually not countless. It's referenced in whole or in part some twenty-seven times across the bandwidth of the Hebrew Bible and finds a notable reference in the New Testament within the prologue to John's gospel which we read earlier this week.

Which means those nine Hebrew words just quoted from Exodus 34.6 form something of the backbone of Old Testament revelation into the nature and heart of God.

To see the glory of God is to begin to grasp the nature and heart of God, and in these words that nature is on display telegraphed to Moses via this backside revelation and fully realized in its display in the face of Jesus.

As we saw yesterday, ancient rabbis quantified thirteen attributes – which may be a bit much for us to carry around with us. Thirteen-point sermons are not exactly portable. But five-point sermons at least have a chance.

So here we condense the thirteen to five, following the lead and labeling of the Bible Project. I invite and encourage you to find the video series at BibleProject.com or if you have margins for

the podcast, there are twelve one-hour episodes (episodes 211-223 from April of 2020) that cover all this ground with beautiful comprehensive and comprehendible clarity.

But for now, here are the five that would form what we can dub the fivefold Name of God:

Compassionate Gracious Slow-to-anger Loyal-love Faithfulness

When you think of God, this the portrait to hang in your internal gallery. I suspect each will have to displace other stubbornly clinging descriptors such as cruel, absent, arbitrary, vengeful, and unreliable. But replace them we must.

Sometime ago my friend Brent gave me a sticker I put on the mug I drink from regularly – it reads "Theology Matters." And it does. "Theology" is what we think and say about God – and what we say about God – especially internally – *matters*. It shapes and colors everything we say and do, determining whether our eyes are "wide open in wonder and belief or squinty with greed and distrust." Outlook determines outcome, as they say.

Our challenge is to allow these five descriptors from this backside revelation moment to Moses in his cave on the stormy mountain become our front and center filters for how we see God, life, and ultimately one another.

RELATE

So, as we pause for a moment of personal reflection and prayer, ponder:

If you had to come up with your own five descriptors for the nature and heart of God, what would they be? Why? How do we discard toxic descriptors within our inner gallery and replace them with the fivefold Name of God in Exodus 34.6-7?

PRAY

Let me suggest a breathing/prayer exercise to help embed the fivefold Name of God within the marrow of our soul. Repeat daily. At least. Seven breaths, inhaling five attributes:

Breathe Adonai (or yod-hey-vav-hey) Breathe Adonai (or yod-hey-vav-hey) Breathe You are Compassionate (or el-roch-hoom) Breathe Gracious (or veh-cha-noon) Breathe Slow-to-anger (or ehrek-aph-fai-yeem) Breathe Overflowing with loyal love (or veh-rav-chesed) Breathe and Faithfulness (or veh-emet)

Amen

(repeat...repeat...)

Sunday, May 19

Awed by your Glory

A prayer inspired by Psalm 81 from *Endless Grace: Prayers Inspired by the Psalms* by Ryan Whitaker Smith and Dan Wilt:

LORD God,

My heart is a wellspring of praise. Awed by Your glory, humbled by Your goodness, songs pour out of me: endless hallelujahs!

> Worship is remembrance: sacred recollection of Your power, providence, presence, peace.

Fill me with Your Spirit, Lord. Slake my thirst with the water of life for I am made for covenant love, and my soul is restless until it finds its rest in You.

> On my best days, I am half-deaf, half-dead: peering through a glass, darkly.

> > I hear Your voice, perceive Your presence, and still I turn away.

Why do I resist Your embrace? Run from Your grace? I languish in body, mind, spirit, while You battle evil on my behalf routing darkness, covering me with Your kindness, sheltering me, a sinner, under the shadow of mercy.

In Your patience, You whisper: "Hear. Heed. Follow. Feast." In You, Lord, are all the desires of my heart: my longings, yearnings, hopes, expectations. In You and You alone, my soul finds rest.

Amen.