

**23<sup>rd</sup> Week after Pentecost, Proper 24 – Year A – October 19, 2008**  
**Exodus 33:12-23, Psalm 99; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; Matthew 22:15-22**  
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Moses said, “if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight.” And the Lord said, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.”

For those of you who were at Wednesday evening’s service I once again ask your indulgence, since food seems to be on my mind this week. In pragmatic terms, I might attribute it to the colder weather. In spiritual terms, it is like Moses’ hunger to see and know the Lord, which is no less a desire of your heart and mine today as it was those thousands of years ago for Moses, and for millions of pilgrims on the way. By God’s blessing, it is the feeding of our body, mind and souls on the Word of God – that are the words of life. Today’s reading from Exodus is truly a feast in and of itself to be savored and enjoyed, all to the glory of God. Consider also, the theme of eating and banquets that we have been following in the Gospel of Matthew. The significance of John the Baptist’s death at Herod’s birthday banquet. Jesus getting into trouble with the leaders of the Temple for not washing His hands before eating. Jesus’ gracious feeding of the multitudes in a deserted place. Jesus preaching in parables about two very different banquets: a brutal earthly banquet verses the heavenly banquet at which you and I already have a place. Here now we see in retrospect what God already knew in his omniscience. In the reading from Exodus, Moses, you and I see the back of the Lord as He passes by. It is God ever moving forward to the fulfillment of His purposes. It is God leading the way for the Israelites, and for you and me. It is God pointing to His future. This is the future, by God’s grace and favor, He reveals Himself humanity and to all creation through the birth, life and death of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Finding favor appears five times in this reading from Exodus. Let’s jump ahead with a sneak peak as we take our seats at the table and skim God’s menu of graciousness here, before we go back and sample the delights of the Exodus feast. It is fascinating to make some connections here through the benefit of hindsight that will help us to understand that simple phrase of “finding favor” with God. In the Hebrew Scriptures, we find Noah, Abraham, Joseph, and Samuel all finding favor with the Lord, as well as Moses. In the Gospel of Luke, we discover Mary finds favor with the Lord as she accepts her call to be God-bearer, the mother of Jesus. On Jesus’ birth, the angels announce to the shepherds, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors.” Jesus grows in wisdom and years as well as in divine and human favor. Jesus’ presence among us is a proclamation of the Lord’s favor, defined as the year of jubilee, where debts are cancelled and slaves are freed. More than this, the proclamation by Jesus of the Lord’s favor means reconciliation with God, and liberation from sin and death. The Lord’s favor is God’s gift of grace. The gift of grace that enabled Moses, Mary and all lovers of God to live lives according to God’s will.

As you and I know, intentional living according to God’s will is tough. In our current state, our fallen humanity, we have a hard time even hearing God. It is therefore no mean thing for Moses to have found favor with God. Moses’ request of God to be shown the way, and to see God’s glory, reflects his longing to get closer to God. Moses’ wish for God’s intimate presence is the same spiritual journey you, me, and all Christians must take of seeking to find the ultimate source of our sustenance and nurture. It is the God-shaped hole, and the restless yearning in the heart of your soul and mine that no one and no thing can fill except God. St. Augustine describes it this way: my soul is restless until it finds its rest in God. We describe our physical food as nourishment or goodness. God describes His spiritual glory as Goodness, and proclaims the name of the Lord as sovereign.

“I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.” God’s own statement of His absolute sovereignty reminds us again of the theme of God’s kingdom. Where there is a kingdom, there is a king, and God is rightfully seated on the throne of our hearts, as our

sovereign Lord. God's words sound selective here, almost arbitrary or capricious. Yet you and I know that God is never arbitrary or capricious and so we must understand this statement as God's amazing grace towards me and you, and all humanity, despite our rebellious egotism, sinfulness and independent ways. God never tires of offering His unending grace and mercy to all who will accept it in faith and repentance. Nothing of humanity's present condition deserves God's mercy, but God gives His mercy freely and unconditionally. So perfect is God, and so imperfect are we that the reality of seeing our Creator's Goodness and Love face to face would overwhelm us completely. It is by God's grace that we are saved, and by God's grace that our human vision is dimmed so we are not destroyed. God's provision for Moses was to hide him in the cleft of a rock, and then allow him to follow God's glory, God's goodness onward. And so we see how God's grace is active, manifesting itself in acts of beneficence. God's grace is the active communication of divine blessing. What then, is our response? Karl Barth once wrote, "Grace and gratitude belong together like heaven and earth. Grace evokes gratitude like the voice an echo. Gratitude follows grace as thunder follows lightening."

Our most significant act of gratitude, or *eucharistia*, is giving glory to God in worship and praise through The Great Thanksgiving feast, which is our foretaste of the heavenly banquet. In order to practice God's graciousness, you and I must come to God's table to be fed and strengthened by Christ's Body and Blood. But that is not all. Our act of gratitude in sharing the Eucharistic feast extends also to how we live out our faith in our words and actions. It is the balance between 'being' – who we are at the depths of our soul, and 'doing' – how we respond to God's gift of grace. That is sharing the living word of God as food for a starving world; and being God's hands and feet, doing the work that God has called us to do, each in our own way. God's call to Moses was to guide, feed and care for the Israelites as they journeyed through the desert to the Promised Land. God's call to you and I is to feed and care for God's children in our own time, as they journey through the maze of the world to relationship with you and me, and most importantly to a relationship with God.

Poet R. Voight captures this beautifully in his poem *The Eucharist*. Quote.

"He was old, tired, and sweaty, pushing his homemade cart down the alley, stopping now and then to poke around in somebody's garbage. I wanted to tell him about EUCHARIST / But the look in his eyes, the despair on his face, the hopelessness of somebody else's life in his cart / Told me to forget it. So I smiled, said 'Hi' – and gave him EUCHARIST.

... She lived alone, her husband dead, her family gone/ And she talked at you, not to you, words, endless words, spewed out / So I listened – and gave her EUCHARIST

.... I laughed at myself, and told myself, 'You, with all your sin, and all your selfishness, I forgive you, I accept you, I love you.' It's nice, and so necessary to give yourself EUCHARIST. /

My Father, when will we learn – You cannot talk EUCHARIST – you cannot philosophize about it. YOU DO IT. ... Sometimes you laugh it, sometimes you cry it, often you sing it. Sometimes it's wild peace, then crying hurt, often humiliating, never deserved./

You see Eucharist in another's eyes, give it in another's hand held tight, squeeze it in an embrace. You pause EUCHARIST in the middle of a busy day, speak it in another's ear, listen to it from a person who wants to talk. /

For EUCHARIST is as simple as being on time and as profound as sympathy. I give you my supper, I give you my sustenance, I give you my life, I give you me, I give you EUCHARIST."

Amen.