

Wrangling and Trusting
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TCC

Exodus 33:12-23

It's interesting that we normally think of Jesus as the one who shows us intimacy with God, but this is pretty intimate. This is like father and son, teacher and student, master and apprentice. Moses is frank, unencumbered, and concerned that God keep God's promises. Moses does not waste his opportunity. Moses is unconcerned about how he might look or sound. Moses does not mince words or beat around the bush (no pun intended!).

Moses is *wrangling* with God. He's pushing and pulling, twisting and turning. Almost like dancing, almost like fighting, almost like challenging. He wants answers. He wants reassurance. *Teach me your ways. Stay with us. Show me your glory.* No holding back in proclaiming and naming what it is that Moses wants. He does not waste his opportunity, nor does he hold back in asking for what he wants. God is patient with Moses. He gives Moses answers but they are not always what he wants.

First of all: YES, I WILL BE WITH YOU. I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU. I WILL GIVE YOU REST. Do we believe these promises? Do we rest on these promises? Do we stand on these promises? Do we affirm our faith in these promises? Or do we become like the Israelites and murmur and complain, forgetting our faith altogether? (In the previous chapter we see them throwing together all their gold for Aaron to make them an idol. They are dancing and throwing a party to the calf.) These are mighty promises that we claim for our own but are they in the foreground of our lives? Do we believe them? Do we rest in them? God's promises are real, friends. But we must tune into them and open our eyes to them and proclaim them in our hearts and in our awareness and in our prayers. [When we pray, do we change our thinking and our speaking? Do we let the prayer sink in?]

Second: What about this glory business? What is glory? Is it white lightning? Is it a silver lining? How about we say that glory is the finished proof of all these promises. Glory is when we can look on a situation and say, Ah! God was here all along. We dance, we struggle, we fight, we twist and turn. And we do not see what is happening during the struggle. We can only trust. We can only obey. We can only walk through the storm and wait. We trust in God's promises and can't see what's happening half the time (maybe it's more for some of us). We see all right, but it's through a glass darkly. Moses saw through a glass darkly. The Israelites saw through a glass darkly. Paul saw through a glass darkly. In sickness we see through a glass darkly. We really can't see God's face, God's hand and God's movement in the middle of it all. So we wrangle. In financial trouble and romantic heartache and addiction and lonely isolation, we truly cannot see God's glory all around, no we cannot. This is where faith comes in.

This is why we let go of what is NOT of God and cling to the promises. How many have been through turmoil and hardship and uncertainty? How many have been confused, overwhelmed, abused or misunderstood, mistreated and mistaken for someone that you are definitely not? Each and every one of us. This little powerful conversation between God and Moses represents all those times. All those times in hospital rooms, all those 3am silent moments of tossing and turning, all those tears shed when nobody is looking.

We all wrangle like this. Our country is wrangling. Our country is twisting and turning and struggling and fighting. But you and I need to be the light, the calm, the welcome and the way. You and I need to trust as God asked Moses to trust: *I am with you. I will give you rest. I will never leave you. And you will see my glory in due time. Trust me. Rest in me.*

And that leads me to the final and most important point: *Moses' faith became who he was.* Moses' faith eclipsed the whining, eclipsed the doubt, eclipsed the intimidation of the people toward their leader. FAITH ITSELF became the man. Moses did not see enough miracles to become faithful. Moses' faith colluded with God to make the miracles happen. The personality, the identity "Moses" both disappeared in the light of faith. This can be a scary thing because we love our personalities. We love our identities. We love our preferences, our history and even our complaining. Moses gave all of that up for a glimpse of God's glory, for the prospect of leading God's people. I know a woman who complains a lot. She complains and asks for special treatment. A lot. This woman said to me once, "There's something about turning fifty that made me just say whatever the blank I want. It took me a long time for that." And I thought (although I didn't say), *It took me a long time to NOT say whatever the blank I want. And that has served me well.* My personality is not what I count on for my identity anymore. It's an okay personality but God is who I count on now.

Now I think more like the hymn written by Fanny Crosby in 1879.

Hold thou my hand; so weak I am, and helpless,
I dare not take one step without thy aid;
Hold thou my hand; for then, O loving Savior,
No dread of ill shall make my soul afraid.

Hold thou my hand, and closer, draw me closer
To thy dear self—my hope, my joy, my all;
Hold thou my hand, lest haply I should wander,
And, missing thee, my trembling feet should fall.

I can imagine Moses felt like this when leading his people out of Egypt. I can imagine he felt all kinds of fear and helplessness. This is how we develop our faith, through our weakness and wrangling, and ultimately, trusting. Then perhaps sing this verse:

Hold thou my hand; the way is dark before me
Without the sunlight of thy face divine;
But when by faith I catch its radiant glory,
What heights of joy, what rapturous songs are mine!

Waiting for evidence is not faith. "Show me the money" is not faith. All the people's approval is definitely not faith. Standing on God's promises with nothing else at all; THAT, my friends is faith. Faith made Moses. And faith made Jesus. And faith makes the man. And faith makes the woman. Faith makes the leader. Faith makes the unmistakable child of God. And faith makes us all, in the face of NO EVIDENCE. NO PRESTIGE. NO MONEY. NO TITLES. NO EARTHLY POWER. Faith is who we are becoming, when we follow (not just in words, not just in deed, but in word and thought) the Way of Christ. Hallelujah.