

## **SERMON: 18 October 2020 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

**Exodus 33:12-23**

**Matthew 22:15-21**

### **The Presence of God**

Moses begins this section by asking YHWH for help or rather asking YHWH to tell him who was going to be his helper. The obvious answer might be Joshua because he was the one who was often with Moses and the one who succeeds Moses in leading the people into the PL.

Joshua of course is the name given to Jesus the Messiah. In other words there is a sense in which Joshua is the right answer because the Messiah, the anointed one, the Saviour is to be Moses' helper.

The Lord's answer to Moses was "my presence will go with you and I will give you rest" (14).

YHWH's Presence is what Moses needs. It's what we all need.

Isn't it incredible that the LORD would desire to be present with us?

I wonder if we can think of that Presence as always being with us, in every place and time.

People through the ages have discovered that Presence and learned to practice it.

And as Moses realises in verse 16 it's the Presence that makes the difference in a person's life.

It's the Presence that causes the face to shine and the heart to sing.

It's the Presence that brings love into the world through the hearts that hold it.

It's the Presence that went with Moses.

It's the Presence that lives in Jesus even though he died.

It's the Presence that is the life giving breath of the Holy Spirit.

God with us and God within us.

We may not see the Presence face to face if you like.

Moses longs to see YHWH's face but he's not permitted to. We don't exactly know why. Perhaps Moses would then feel he'd seen it all and would be difficult to be open to new things in God?

He may not have seen YHWH's face but he was able to see YHWH's glory all around. He could see the Presence.

Again, a bit like the Wind. You can't see it but you can see what it does.

Later in the NT, the apostle Paul says, "now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror (but) then we shall see face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

The Presence of God is shrouded in mystery but has been disclosed to us through the Scriptures, the Living Word, through the person of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

I'm not sure how the Gospel reading fully ties in with this but Matthew 22 has an interesting encounter between the Pharisees and Jesus about paying taxes.

Jesus, acting fully with the Presence of God we've been thinking about, makes it clear that taxes should be paid, implying that these are relatively easy to repay - you give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar.

Giving to God, on the other hand, would not be so easy to repay, in fact, we could never repay what we owe God.

I don't think the parable is really about that though. The key is in verse 18 where it says that Jesus knew their evil intentions. He knew they were trying to trap him in his words, get him to say something that they could then accuse him of, because they didn't like the way of Jesus.

Jesus points out that what they should really be concerned about is giving God what belongs to God.

And what is that? One's whole life. Our whole lives belong to God and are made to be given to God.

The prophet Micah points to this when he says, and what does the Lord require of you but to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God (6:8).

That was something the Pharisees were not doing here, And Jesus calls them out.

And what about us?

Knowing that the Presence of God is promised to us, how can we give our lives to God through acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly?

How can we embrace our world with God's unfailing love?

How can we make this mysterious presence known, at home, at work, at play, and at rest?

May the presence of the Holy Spirit lead you, accompany you and inspire you to great things.