Sermon Text – Sunday, October 18, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

1st Reading: Matthew 22:15-22; 2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
Scripture for Message: Exodus 33:12-23 "God's Glory"

And the Lord said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The Lord;' and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."

What Moses asks of the Lord are things we all ask of God from time to time, individually and collectively as a community and a nation. "Show me your ways" "Consider that this nation is your people" and "For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us?" We ask for God to bless our proceedings, our meetings, and all our activities whether in time of peace or times of war. We ask for God to show us favor and we ask for God to show us God's glory. The response Moses gets is the response we all get – "I will do the very thing you have asked" however "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." That does not mean ours are the only requests God grants. In whatever way we interpret this, grace and mercy for all are central to God's character.

I want to give you some context for this passage. Moses and the Israelites have been encamped at the foot of Mt. Sinai for about two years now, they arrived here only three months after escaping Egypt. Moses has spent considerable time on the Mount in conversation with God, receiving the commandments and the Torah law and transmitting that information to the people. The "conversation" we read about today occurs after the incident with the Golden Calf, and so God calls on Moses to take the people and leave Mt. Sinai.

Because of that, Moses asks for assurance of God's presence, and this is not the first time. When Moses comes upon the burning bush, he asks for a sign of God's presence. Then, after the first Passover, God's presence was with the Israelites in a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. That way Moses was assured God was with him and his people throughout this ordeal. And I wonder if Moses was a little tired of the people and their

childish disobedience because this is one of the many times Moses intercedes for the people of Israel. I wonder if his purposes for stressing this is to get the assurance that God would not only be with Moses himself, but also with the people as an entire community particularly after the Golden Calf incident.

Moses does not get exactly what he asks. It seems to me that Moses asks for God to assure him and the people of "special status" as a "favored nation" and I don't see in the reply where God does exactly that – instead the reply is "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." We read that God makes a concession to Moses and agrees to, "make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The Lord'." God promises to show Moses God's glory "but you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live." This seemingly contradicts what we are told about the relationship between God and Moses – that according to what is written in scripture they have had "face-to-face" conversations.

There are recorded incidents where faithful followers of the Lord claim to "see" the face of God and live to tell the story. We can read in Genesis how Jacob wrestled with the Lord at Peniel proclaiming, "I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." Moses asks for more than just "seeing" God, he expresses his desire to really know God more fully, to experience God's presence completely. God withholds his face, the fullness of his image/visage – and maybe the others who claim to have "seen" God have only seen God's goodness, which we also see.

God grants to Moses – the opportunity to "see" God more fully, to know God on a deeper level. God does not however reveal God's full self to Moses. Take note that God does not say, "I will not show you my face" only that "You cannot see my face" and it is apparent to me that the "face" of God is something mere humans could not even comprehend – we cannot see what we don't have the ability to fully understand.

Furthermore, I see a deeper mystery in this passage, one that we often do not recognize. God is determined to make all God's goodness

pass before Moses. God will proclaim before Moses the name, 'The Lord' making God's full identity known to Moses. I wonder when God adds, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" if this isn't exactly how God's goodness is revealed. In his commentary of this passage, Victor Hamilton writes, "What is often mistaken in the church for a troublesome expression of divine arbitrariness is really an expression of divine freedom and a corrective to the tendency of religious institutions to define in their own terms who are deserving of God's mercy."[1] Oh, you folks have heard this before, God is God and we cannot chose for God who is shown mercy.

Maybe it trips us up a little when we remember from Isaiah and from the book of Esther – about the calling of Cyrus, a Persian ruler, someone God used for God's purposes. Cyrus was a ruthless Persian warrior who conquered Babylon and eventually began to allow the Israelites their freedom from exile and their return to Judea and Jerusalem. God proclaims to Cyrus, "I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me, so that they [emphasis on THEY] may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:5). God will be gracious to whom God will be gracious and God will use for God's purposes whom God will use.

Show us your ways, we want to understand! It is a characteristic of humanity to want to know God, or a higher power, on a deeper level. We want to be closer to the one in whose image we were created – that is instinctive in us. But God does not reveal God's self completely, and I wonder if it is because God is bigger than our minds could possibly absorb. We know there is power in God's image and in God's presence, so we look for that. Furthermore, if we honestly seek God with pure motives, God is everywhere we look!

This Old Testament writing leads us to think about what Matthew writes in our scripture reading from his Gospel this morning. The Pharisees

[1] Hamilton, Victor P. *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*. Baker Academic. 2011. Print. 571

were trying to trap Jesus in their questions about paying taxes. Jesus is aware of the power of "image" and responds to their question [as usual] with one of his own, "Whose head and whose title is on the coin used for the tax?" The coin bears the image of the emperor therefore give the emperor his due and give to God what belongs to God. Building on that, what Moses asks, and we all ask to "see" God to know that image on a deeper level. Who is God, and what is God's glory? Answering these questions or at least trying too helps us to feel God's presence and to understand more fully how we, who are created in the image of God, are to live.

When Jesus calls us to give to God what is God's how do we know? How do we know what bears God's image like the coins that carry the image of the emperor? That is the same question Moses wants answered, show me your glory, show me your ways – I want to see you more clearly. The thing is, we do have our blueprint to who God is, a picture of God's image is available for us. Scriptures tell us the story of who God is, and one specific verse comes to mind. Micah 6:8, "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

I wonder though if we try to place in God's character, and attribute to God things which are not God's. When Moses speaks to God and states, "Consider too that this nation is your people" or when he says "In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people" he is claiming exceptionalism. Moses is asking for "favored nation" status. God reminds Moses – I will show mercy on whom I show mercy – in other words, to me, God says I will make my goodness pass before you but don't think it's only you or the people you lead who will experience my goodness.

There are many things which we attribute to "the will of God" and I wonder if that is actually the case. I don't believe, and I think we can read it here, that God favors one over another, one nation over another, or one ethnic group over another. God loves all of God's creation, it is true and we can read in the prophet's writings, God will use even non-

believers as ways to bring people, even nations, into alignment with God's will. But it is important that we do not assign to God things that are not God's.

I wonder if what is going on in our world today is the will of God, even when we say that God is in control I wonder if humanity is fighting with all the power of the world to wrestle control from our creator. If we attribute acts of violence, even acts in retribution for violence, to God's will then we are wrong. Violence, oppression, mistreatment of others, these are not things that God wills. God will prevail; goodness will win in the end – on that day on God's holy mountain.

Probably, like some of you, I am having difficulty wrapping my head around what is going on in the Middle East. I can't give a message about God's love and God's presence without acknowledging what is happening there and in our world. I know that it is not God's will that war and is happening. Violence is never the answer and terroristic acts are inexcusable. My heart goes out to the many innocents that are caught in the middle. Innocent non-combatants, civilians, women, and children who are affected. The problem is not with the people of these countries whether they are Arab, Muslim, or Jew – the problem is not with their religious beliefs, the problem lies within governments and with those who govern or rule according to their own personal interests.

Give to God what is God's – and it is all God's, justice, peace, and mercy these things are God's. Grace, justice, forgiveness, and mercy are in God's character. Are you curious about God's image? We can just look in the mirror; for each of us is created in God's image. You see God by "seeing" others. Because of Jesus, we know God is present and available to everyone everywhere.