

16 October 2011, Pentecost 16

I WILL GO WITH YOU!

EXODUS 33:14 (NLT)

And the LORD replied, “I will personally go with you, Moses. I will give you rest—everything will be fine for you.”

Moses was close to being ‘burnt out’.

Haven’t you had a time when you were fed up with everything? Nothing was going right – troubles at home, at work . . . everywhere! And all you want to do is crawl into a hole somewhere, and be left alone.

That’s how Moses felt.

He was the leader of the Israelites.

But they had done a terrible wrong: they had worshipped an idol, a golden calf. Moses had smashed the two stone tablets of the ten commandments. God had just said he would no longer travel with his people, but still expected them to go into the promised land, even though it was occupied by war-faring peoples.

What a mess! It’s too much for me! Leave me alone on the mountainside. Go look after yourself.

But God does not leave Moses alone.

And neither will he leave you alone!

Moses was given the chance to compare the size of his troubles to how big God is. God stuck Moses in a cleft in a rock on the mountainside, and walked past him. But even then God had to protect Moses so that he could only see the smallest part of God’s glory.

But that was enough for Moses. It was enough for him to see just a little bit of God’s glory to know that none of his troubles could ever outweigh the greatness of God.

Again Moses is not really like Charlton Heston in the movie Ten Commandments. He is not some suave, muscly, confident

hero. He's just an ordinary bloke – a sheep and goat herder for goodness sake! He can't even talk well.

He's like you and me. Ordinary! Fumbling! Much rather be elsewhere. Full of doubts, and full of “What about me?” and “Why me” and “Poor little me!” questions.

But God is with him.

And that makes all the difference.

And the first step for that truth to work in our lives is for us to realize that God is far bigger than anything that could ever happen to us.

So what is God like? How would you describe God?

A class at a seminary was asked that question by the lecturer.

After a lengthy silence, some said “God is love”, and others said “God is just”. But the professor sat there, unimpressed.

Finally, after they had exhausted everything they knew or had ever heard about what God was like, he leant over and said, “Men and women, let me tell you something. God is not like anything. He is His own standard. And the tragedy is that you are going to build your little theological boxes around what you think God is like. Someday when you really need Him, you're going to race to your box and open the lid, and He won't be in there.

“God does not allow us to continue to reduce Him to a size and shape we can manage. He moves in our lives in ways that burst our categories and overwhelm our finiteness. When we realize He's bigger than anything we can get our minds around we can begin to relax and trust Him.”

Moses realized that God is bigger than anything that could ever happen in his life. So he came out of the hole in the rock with renewed confidence. Of course there were going to be other problems and crises and everything else. But God had promised: *I will be with you*, and that was enough for Moses.

Many centuries later, Jesus came along. And just before he returned to heaven we read this (from Matthew 28):

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them still doubted!

¹⁸ Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

I want to draw two points out of this text:

First, we're told quite clearly that among Jesus' followers there were still some who doubted. What an amazing thought! These first Christians were not the perfect heroes of the faith we might think they were. Like Moses, they were like you and me too: doubts and uncertain, and wondering what's going to happen next - the whole silly mix of what it means to be an ordinary human being who is trying to follow Jesus to the best of one's ability.

But the comforting thing is that it is not one's ability that is important. What is important is Jesus' promise: *And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

So, with God's promise standing the test of time, first to Moses then to Christians, let's see what we can make of what's been happening recently.

What can we make of destructive storms, flash floods, bush fires, vehicle crashes. And you may have your own matters to deal with.

What can we make of all this?

Some people, of course, would talk about these things being signs of the end times. Which is true, of course.

But that's not what I want to talk about.

What I want to get across is that one may well feel like going into hiding – getting away from it all – crawling into a deep dark cave.

But I don't believe that's what God wants us to do at such times.

In fact, if anything, he calls us out of our hiding places.

Moses had thought he could find peace by being on his own, hiding in a cave. But God knew better: true peace only comes from knowing that God is with you.

We are God's people. And he is with us. If there is anyone in this world who can face the troubles and the horrors that life can throw at us, it should be us – God's people who are known as Christians.

I am not saying we don't hurt or cry or grieve. Of course we do. And of course we also need time out from all the hurly burly.

But we know the greatness of God. We know God's greatness is greater than anything in this world – good or evil! And so we have a sure confidence in our lives. God is with us!

Now, how you express that confidence and that trust in God's presence – that will vary from person to person, because it depends partly on what sort of personality you are, and partly on what your life involves – work, family, community, culture and the like.

But even so, don't lose heart! Don't cower away. God is with you.

Listen again to what God promised Moses, and apply it to yourself; for it is now true for each of us because Jesus is with us:

“I will personally go with you, N. (put your own name here). I will give you rest—everything will be fine for you.”

I will personally go with you, N.

I will give you rest.

Everything will be fine for you.

Take hold of that threefold promise. It's yours just as much as it was Moses'.

Amen.