

## “Justice, Justice, Shall You Pursue: Answering God’s Call to Protect Children”

### Exodus 33: 12-23

As we gather today to celebrate and remember our responsibility to and for our children and to and for the children of our community, nation, and world, we gather together to take a look at a wonderful, transforming text from the Exodus that shaped the relationship between the people of God and God. Throughout the story of the Exodus, we are told of moments where the people and God work out the details of their relationship together. And each and every time, in these moments of negotiations, there was always one request from the people of God, one request that the people of God thought would strengthen their relationship with God, one request that the people of God never wavered from in their negotiations. That one request was for more and more visible signs of God’s presence among the people of God.

The people wanted tangible signs to know that God’s presence was among the people of God and every time they would bring up this request, God would say, “No one can fully see the presence of God and live. No one can fully comprehend the character of God. No one can fully capture the presence of God, look upon the face of God and live”

But the people wouldn't listen. They wanted these visible signs to reassure them. They wanted these visible signs to know that they were set apart from others. They wanted these visible signs to know that the presence of God was among the people of God. And time and time again, God would say it doesn't work that way.

In our text this morning, the people have taken matters into their own hands. They ignored God's words and God's call to trust in God alone and they have decided to build their own god. They melted all their gold and built the Golden Calf.

And it is at this point, that our scripture picks up the story line. God has finally had enough. God tells Moses, "I'm done. I'm done with these people. They don't listen. They are determined to do their own thing. So I'm washing my hands of the people you, Moses, brought out of Egypt. If I stay with this group any longer, I'm bound to consume them because they sure do know how to push my buttons." Said like any good parent who has reached his or her breaking point.

And then Moses steps in and the wonderful thing about this text is that Moses knows that he is in a relationship, a partnership with God and holds God accountable for God's actions. He turns to God and says, "Look, God. I didn't bring them out of Egypt. I was minding my own business with my flocks of sheep until you spoke to me at the burning bush. You said that you heard the people's cry. You said that you couldn't stand to see your people mistreated. You are the

ones that brought them out of Egypt. We have been following you.” And then Moses goes on to say, “ Look, God, you knew what you were getting when we started out on this journey. You knew that this group could be hard headed. You knew that this group doesn’t listen all the time. You knew all this and still you entered into a relationship with us. And now is the time, to be in that relationship with us.” Said like any good traveling partner!

And the blessing of this text is that at that moment, we see when God makes up God’s mind. It is almost as if God says, “Moses, you are right. The people are going to keep making me angry. The people are going to keep asking me for signs to reassure them that I’m with them. The people are going to keep insisting that I have them a visible sign that the presence of God is among the people of God. So I’ll help them out a little. Even though, the people of God will never be able to fully see me or know me completely, I let them see glimpses of the divine in their lives. I’ll let them see glimpses of the Holy in their lives. I’ll let them experience moments of sacredness in their lives.”

The people will see glimpses of God in their lives and know that the presence of God is among the people of God.

And that is the good news for us this morning. We are invited to embrace the knowledge that while we don’t have the ability to fully comprehend the fullness of God, we can and we do see the resulting impact of presence of God among the

people of God. Each and every time, we experience grace in our lives, we experience the presence of God. Each and every time, we practice justice in our communities, we experience the presence of God. Each and every time, we show compassion to all of God's children, we experience the presence of God in our lives. The good news for us this morning is that although we cannot know God fully, we can catch glimpses of God's glory, glimpses of God's presence, glimpses of God in our lives, we know that every time we open our eyes and experience the Kingdom of God in our midst, we experience the presence of God among the people of God.

God has answered our requests to know God more fully, to experience God more completely, to see the face of God in our lives by inviting us to be in relationship with God, a relationship that has room for mystery as well as knowledge, a relationship that is based on faith rather than sight, a relationship that strengthens the understanding that we are accompanied along life's way by our God at all times and through all of life's varied circumstances. We just have to be in tune with the Holy to see these glimpses of God in our lives.

God is a constant in our lives and call us to share this good news with a world that is hurting, that is broken, and that is need of some grace and justice. The good news for us this morning is that we know that as we experience the presence of God in our lives more and more, when we are open to where the Spirit of God is

leading us, when we open our eyes to the Kingdom of God in our midst, our lives are transformed. Our lives are changed. Our lives become visible signs of the presence of God among the people of God because that is how the Kingdom of God works here on earth.

God knew that we as the people of God would never be able to fully know the character of God until our lives, until our very beings, until our communities of faith begin to reflect that good news that the presence of God is among the people of God. God knew that the world would doubt, the world would be in darkness until we as the people of God, became visible signs of the Light of God, until our lives begin to be something of who God really is, until our lives became visible signs of the character of God. That is why we as people of faith are called to live lives that reflect mercy and grace, that reflect steadfast love and faithfulness, lives that reflect peace and hope. Because that is one of the ways God is still speaking to this world.

God created us to be visible signs of the presence of God among the people of God.

The good news for us this morning is that there are visible signs of God's presence among the people of God. When in doubt, just look in the mirror. But these signs, our bodies, are only part of the message. It is when we truly live lives that reflect the character of God that the world will understand that our God, who

created the heaven and the earth, our God who knows our comings and our goings, is among the people of God from the beginning of time until time is no more. The presence of God is among the people of God, experienced for all of God's children through the lives and actions of God's people.

That is why we must seek justice for all of God's children. That is why we must become a voice for the voiceless. That is why we must become the heart and the hands of God for the people of God in our communities and in our world.

Today, our text invites us to open our eyes to the visible signs of God's presence among the people of God that are already happening in our communities and in our world. The funny thing about these signs is that we expect them to be glaringly obvious with lights and music and great big arrows. We expect these signs to have words that flash: "This is a sign from God. Pay attention!"

But our text challenges us to remember that our God doesn't always do what we expect. It invites us to remember that our God has done so much more than we could have imagined. Our God calls us as the people of God to be in relationship with God who is slow to anger, who is steadfast, who is merciful and gracious, who is faithful to all generations and once in relationship as God's partners, we are invited to have our lives so transformed and changed that we become visible signs of God's presence for the people of God.

As the people of God, we know that we can catch a glimpse of the Holy, we can catch a glimpse of the divine, we can catch a glimpse of the Kingdom of God in our midst, when we live lives that reflect the character of God, when we live lives of justice, compassion, and grace, all the while knowing that the presence of God is among the people of God, leading us, guiding us, supporting us, and giving us opportunities to experience the presence of God in our lives.

The good news for us this morning is that although we constantly ask for proof of God's presence in our lives, proof of God's intentions for us as God's people, proof of God's plan for our lives, God has not ignored our pleas. God has heard our cries and God has responded by inviting us to experience the presence of God already found in the ordinary moments of our lives, to experience the presence of God already found in our relationships with one another, to experience the presence of God and see where God is already working in our communities and in our lives. God has responded by inviting us to have our lives so transformed and changed by God's grace and God's love that we become visible signs of the presence of God among the people of God.

May we always that we are the visible signs that celebrate the presence of God is among the people of God. Amen.