

Sunday 18th October

Service Prepared by Reverend Alan Missen

Call to worship (Psalm 96: 1-9)

Leader: O sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.

All: Sing to the lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.

Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous works among all the peoples.

For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods.

For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.

Honour and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

Ascribe to the Lord, o families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts.

Worship the Lord in holy splendour; tremble before him, all the earth.

Reading: Exodus 33.12-23

Sermon: *The Presents of God*

How many of you have taken time with God by contemplating a lit candle?

Luci Shaw wrote this poem:

*His candle shines upon my head.
He trims the wick and guards the flame
and though the darkness creeps in close
the steadfast taper shines the same.*

*The flower of flame sways in the air.
Wind fingers snatch and try to snuff
the stalk his careful hands protect.
The light shines through. It is enough.*

*His candle shines on me in love,
(protective circle in the gloom)
and through the dreadful night I know
that he is with me in the room.*

*Throughout the weary waiting-time
the liquid flame shines thin and pure.
When tiredness dims my faith, I look
and see his light, and I am sure.*

For me, the candlelight is a symbol of God's presence. That is a key issue of our worship as God's people--do we encounter the presence of God? It's also a key issue for living- to know that God is with me along life's journey. It was THE key issue for Moses. The book of Exodus is saturated with it. God was present as his people journeyed towards the Promised Land.

Yet they almost lost it, after they worshipped the golden calf. For them the light of the candle almost went out.

God earlier has told Moses that he will send his angel with them, but he his personal presence will not be with them. Moses is devastated. But in the dialogue that follows God makes an amazing promise: *The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here."* **Exodus 33:14-15 (NIV)**

What a promise! God simply being there for Moses.

Last Sunday I was preaching on Philippians 4 in Amberley and highlighted the following verse: *Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.* **Philippians 4:5**

The second sentence can mean two things—and Paul may be deliberately ambiguous here so that we take them both on board.

The first means that the Lord is coming soon, as the GNB says.

The second means simply the Lord is beside us.

That latter meaning fits well with our passage today.

Remember what Jesus promised his disciples before he left planet Earth?
And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. **Matthew 28:20**

And we have the promise in Hebrews: *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." ⁶So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"* **Hebrews 13:5-6**

Patrick of Ireland understood this as he highlighted in what is called his "Breastplate."

**Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.**

Today's passage not only highlights the promise of God's PRESENCE but emphasises other things as well. What I would call Gods P-R-E-S-E-N-T-S or simply God's gracious gifts!

Moses has real personal value to God. So do you and I. This is highlighted in two ways.

Firstly, in verse 17, God affirms that he knows Moses very well; literally “I know you by name.” That is at the heart of any relationship with God!

Remember the words of Jesus in John’s Gospel? The shepherd “calls his own sheep by name.” Just as the sheep followed the Middle Eastern shepherd, so you and I follow Jesus. God says to you and me, “I know you by name.”

Secondly, he is special to God because he has pleased God. Literally it goes “you have found favour in my eyes.” Paul writes to the Corinthians about this life and the one to come, and says, “More than anything else we want to please the Lord.” That’s the goal of any servant of God, and Moses had succeeded in pleasing God.

We all need this sort of affirmation in our lives. It is something that we would normally receive from our parents. They gave us a special name. They told us that they loved us and were pleased with us.

The sad thing is that a lot of people have not had that sort of background. They have had parents who have criticised them and not affirmed them. Some of you may have had parents who failed to give you the sort of encouragement you needed. You know what? God wants to do it for you instead. He cannot remove those sad memories, but he can take the hurt out of your heart. As your heavenly Father he can hold you in his arms—in a spiritual sense—and say to you, “I have called you by name, you are special to me.”

Moses is also affirmed because God responds to his heart cry. Look at verse 14, which the GNB translates rather feebly. I like the NIV translation of this verse, which is far more powerful. *“My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”*

A fantastic promise from God’s word!

I don’t know why the GNB uses the word “victory” because it doesn’t describe the Hebrew word used here at all. It’s the same word used in chapter 20 where it says that God “rested” on the seventh day. I guess in one sense God is saying to Moses, “My presence shall go with you and I will take the load of your back.”

Then Jesus said, *“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28*

It’s a bit like when Peter writes to Christians and says “Cast all your cares on God, because he cares for you!”

So, we have all these presents or gifts from God, quite apart from him sticking with us through thick and thin. His presence is probably the greatest gift of all!

Then: He knows us intimately—he knows us by name.

He is pleased with us. And he gives us rest—he takes the load off our back.

I invite you to seek him to do exactly that for you today.

Amen.