

Dear Friends,

Exodus 24: 1-8

Moses has been given God's teaching and guidance. This includes the Ten Commandments along with various other regulations. If the people can put this instruction into practice, it will help them to flourish and live an abundant life. The land where they are going will then become a promised land. The people hear the teaching and they say, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do."

The problem is that saying we will live well does not always mean that we do live well. The people are honest. They know that it is sensible, right, and in their best interests to keep these commandments. In the moment when they make the promise, they are confident that they can keep it. But we won't have to go much further in the story before we see the commandments being broken. The Hebrew scriptures will then continue with the people breaking them again and again and again. They know what it is to do the right thing. They know what they should do. But they do not do the good they want, instead the evil they do not want is what they do. Maybe you sometimes feel the same. It's not through our own resolve, not through our might and power that the will of God will be done in us. We need something more than that.

Let's stay with the story, perhaps it will help us.

So, Moses has received the commandments and the people have promised to obey them. They seal their agreement with God in this way. We don't much like this but let's stick with it. Moses builds an altar. Some animals are sacrificed. Moses takes the blood from the sacrifices and splashes half of it on the altar. Then he reads the book of the covenant which contains the teaching he's just received. The people respond by saying "All that the Lord has said we will do and we will be obedient." Then the other half of the blood is splashed on the people.

In those days deals and contracts were often sealed with blood. Two people making an agreement might both dip their hands in the same blood, or they might exchange smears of blood. They were saying we are now of the same blood. We are committed to each other. We will do nothing to hurt one another and we will do whatever we can to help one another. So here, half the blood is splashed on the altar which represents God and the other half is splashed on the people. God and the people are sealed together in commitment to one another. They are both bound not to harm each other but to act for one another's well-being.

This is the foundation upon which we can build. What comes first is not our commitment to keep a list of rules, however good those rules might be. What comes first is our relationship with God. We are invited into fellowship with God where there is mutual indwelling and self-giving. So, God is in you and you are in God. God gives Godself to you and you give yourself to God. You and God belong to each other, are united, are made one. From out of that relationship can flow naturally and easily the good and happy lives, that will bring help and joy to others, and are what God wants for you.

God bless you,
Tony