

Dear Friends,

Exodus 24: 9-11

The little girl had been impatient for her father's return from the mountain. The things that had happened around that mountain had been awesome and had made her feel rather frightened. She, along with others had heard the voice of God. It was too much for them. They told Moses that they would prefer it if he listened for them and then let them know what God had said. Her Dad however, had been one of those selected to go up the mountain with Moses. She was bursting to find out what had happened.

Her father returned. He was shaking and trembling. But there was also a deep calm about him. He had a contented smile and a distant look in his eyes as though he had seen powerful things. She pulled on his arm to get his attention. He looked at her and slowly seemed to come back from his far-away place. "Yes", she thought "He's coming home. I'm getting my Dad back". The blissful smile slowly became the affectionate smile that she always knew was just for her. She asked the question that had been burning within her.

"What happened up there, Dad?"

He struggled to find the right words. But eventually something came. He said "We saw God".

"Wow!" She said, "That's fantastic. What was God like?"

He thought for even longer, before grasping the only words he could find "Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness".

She was, to be honest, a bit disappointed by this description. She waited for a moment, eager to hear more. When no more came she pulled on his arm again and said.

"Okay, so that's what was under God's feet, but what does God look like? What kind of form does God take? How does God's voice sound? What is God's face like?"

Her father thought for a moment. But all he could say was "Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness".

She gave up. She knew that she would get no more out of him. She walked away turning only to say "I wish Mum had gone instead of you. She would have found something better to say".

People in the Bible are often at a loss when it comes to putting into words their encounters with God. They end up talking not about central things, like the face of God, but about things on the edge. Isaiah of Jerusalem is an example of that. He sees God high and lifted up and what does he describe? He describes the edge of God's cloak which he says fills the Temple. Or, there's the time when Moses asks to see God's glory. He is told that he may not see God's face but he will be allowed to see God's back. Or there's our story where the description of God focuses on what was under God's feet.

We are being reminded again that we cannot expect to get our minds around the whole truth about God. God is way beyond what we can think or imagine. As the prophet hears God say, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways ... For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts".

Having said that, we dare to believe that we may know something about God. We may know enough. We may know what we need to know. It is interesting to see how much is given to us in the few words which describe this meeting with God. So, in our story God's foot rest is described as being "Like the very heaven for clearness". They look at it and they feel as though they can see clear through to heaven. The whole of heaven seems to be contained in this tiny glimpse of the glory at the edge of God.

God is encountering you. This often comes in little glimpses. But maybe in these little glimpses you will be able to see clear through to heaven, maybe the whole of heaven will be contained in them. Most of all God is encountering you in Jesus who is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, who is close to the Father's heart and has made God known.

There is more to learn from this encounter. The leaders of the people see God. The feeling at the time was that you could not see God and live. They believed that they would be overwhelmed by the experience of seeing God. They would not be able to survive it. The story however, tells us that "God did not lay his hand on" them. They are not destroyed. More than that, God feeds and nourishes them. It says "And they ate and drank." God does not harm them. God does them good. God meets their needs. God takes care of them.

They learn what Jeremiah later got to understand. He heard God say, "I have plans for you, plans not for your harm but for your welfare, to give you a future with hope." Or as Jesus later said, "God did not send his son into the world in order to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

We saw earlier that covenants could be sealed through blood. They could also be sealed when a meal was shared between those making the agreement. By eating together, you committed yourselves to each other. You agreed not to harm each other but to act for one another's well-being. Through sharing a meal, God and the people bind themselves to one another. So, the covenant between God and people is sealed twice. It is doubly sealed. It is sealed both by blood and with a meal.

Here's the foundation on which we build. The foundation of our relationship with God. A relationship in which we feel safe with God, for God will not harm us but will always do us good. Through this we can begin to live for God and together work to make this world a promised land for all God's people.

God bless you,

Tony