

Dear Friends,

Moses, and the people he leads, have finally arrived at Mount Sinai. Here God will give them the Commandments. It is an awesome moment to be approached with reverence. When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, Moses was told to take off his shoes for he was on holy ground. Now, not just Moses but all the people are to prepare themselves for an encounter with God. This is a sacred place which must be approached with solemnity and gravity.

I don't usually reach for the big, heavy words like "Solemnity" and "Gravity". They sound dull and cheerless. Actually, they don't have to mean that, but they do mean that something is serious, weighty, impressive, and important. That's what the writer wants to say about what is happening between God and the people at the mountain; it is significant, it matters. The story teller puts this across in imagery. The people are told to prepare themselves for the moment when God will come down upon the mountain. They are to get ready by washing their clothes and refraining from sex. There are signs which show the whole creation being affected by what is taking place. There is thunder and lightning. There is thick cloud and smoke. The mountain shakes. There is a trumpet blast so loud that it makes the people tremble. Moses warns that people or even animals are not to come too close to the mountain for if they touch it, they will be put to death.

It's heavy stuff. The point the writer wants to make is that God is to be approached with reverence. Your God is too small if you make God too homely and safe. Yes, God is good and yes, God is love, but God is also awesome and majestic, high above you and far beyond what you can think or imagine.

The people stay in their place around the mountain while Moses goes up to be with God. The journey of the people is one from the house of slavery to the promised land. That is not only a journey from one place on a map to another, it is also a journey from one way of living to another. The way of living that will make of life a promised land is the way taught in the principles which God will now give to Moses.

The you to whom the Commandments are directed is you in the singular, they are addressed to you as an individual. They first tell you of your duty to God and then of your duty to others. Both of these are of equal concern to God. Jesus reaffirms this when he holds together the commands to love God and love your neighbour.

So, we do not approach these words casually but with reverence. This is solemn, that is, it is serious, weighty and important. But it is not dreary or dull. Once a year Jewish people celebrate Joy in the Torah. On this day, they take out the scrolls which contain the Commandments and they dance with them. These words may be our dance partner. They are a gift from God which if we can live by them will give us energy and life.

PS - We should mark this moment. It is our 100th Keeping in Touch. I think it may actually be my 102nd letter since Lockdown began, I wrote a couple before we gave them a title. Thank you for sticking with me through this and for all the encouragement you give and the comments you make. To be honest, I would prefer there not to be the need for us to make it to a 200th edition, but who knows. Whatever the future holds, it is really important for us to stay close to each other and to God. I'm grateful if you find this one small way in which we may do that.

God bless you,

Tony