

LENT 2024

JOURNEY to FREEDOM

FRIDAY 22ND MARCH

READ: Exodus 19:16-25

‘Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God.’

Exodus 19:17

The people of Israel had been miraculously delivered from slavery in Egypt by the hand of the Lord. The Lord had provided them with bread and water in the desert, despite their complaining, and had protected them from attack. In all of this deliverance, provision, and protection however, it appears that Israel had yet to properly meet her God... until now.

Now that they have camped at Mount Sinai, Moses brings the people out of their camp to the foot of the mountain where God would reveal Himself. They had consecrated themselves, knowing that this God, their deliverer and provider, was holy. What they experienced surely was beyond any preparation, expectation, or comprehension. In this encounter there is smoke and fire and trembling and a trumpet blast of increasing volume as the Lord God draws near. The holiness of Israel’s God is clear in the repeated warnings about coming too close. This God is an awesome God.

How do we respond when we read this passage? Do we read this as a strange encounter from long ago that doesn’t have much relevance to our worship today? Do we read it with a degree of discomfort, wondering why God is portrayed as so frightening? Do we dismiss it as ‘old covenant’ practice that no longer applies to us? The author of Hebrews helps us by comparing this meeting with God on Mount Sinai to the encounter that believers have with God because of the work of Christ (Hebrews 12:18-29). As those who participate in the new covenant because of Jesus, we do not come to a mountain surrounded by darkness, gloom, and tempest, full of terror that results in running away from the voice of God. No, we come to another mountain – Mount Zion – which is marked by joy and the assembly of God’s people. We come to Jesus as the mediator of a new covenant.

This doesn’t mean we can come as we please: the author of Hebrews affirms that we offer God our worship in reverence and awe because He is a consuming fire. But because of the work of Jesus, we can come boldly to the throne of grace with confidence, not shaking with terror but gripped by awe and wonder at the grace and love given to us in Christ. This encounter with our Living God is a vital part of our journey to freedom, and it is not a one-off encounter but one we repeatedly return to as we worship with our sisters and brothers in our journey together as the people of God.

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