

Sermon Summary
18th after Pentecost
16th October 2011

- If this reading had started one verse earlier, it would have become very puzzling.
- Exodus 33:18-23 maintains the tradition that no-one could see the face of God and live
- Exodus 33:11, on the other hand, Moses meeting God face to face. So do Exodus 24:9-11 and Deut. 34:10. What are we to make of the contradiction?
- The books of the Pentateuch or Torah (Gen, Ex, Lev Num and Deut) are written over a long period of time: they are re-edited and added to, but tradition dictated that deletions were less likely. So they record changes in thinking over the generations.
- At different times, people thought differently about how close they might get to God. At some points., they thought intimacy was possible (face to face), at others that they were not worthy (cannot see God's face and live)
- T.S. Eliot put it a different way: mankind cannot bear too much reality.
- We may continue to hold either view, but we may combine them.
- We see God face to face because he chooses to come close to us, not just in those few verses from the OT, but in the whole action of the Incarnation. God comes close to us that we may learn better who he is, and follow the example of living which he gives us.
- But equally, we cannot see the face of God and live. Which does not mean we are doomed, but rather that we must be careful not to take God's gift of Himself for granted, or think that we have fully understood who he is.
- God may have come close to us, but we need to be careful that we neither become overconfident, nor limit God to what we are able to believe in (any god I can fully understand or explain is too small to be truly God), nor take Him for granted.

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