

Sometimes I wonder if Moses thought this whole “exodus adventure” was a suicide mission that God had sent him on. Other times I wonder if Moses simply took leave of his senses. But most of the time I think Moses embodies the Yiddish word *chutzpah*, which can mean: impudence; gall; brazen nerve; insolence; arrogant self-confidence; audacity; cheek. Someone with *chutzpah* may display bravery that borders on rudeness; or will speak what they think without worrying about hurting someone’s feelings, looking silly, or getting in trouble. *Chutzpah*.

I think *chutzpah* neatly sums up Moses’ exchange with God in last week’s reading from Exodus 32 where Moses boldly told God not to lose God’s temper and to calm down. I think *chutzpah* also aptly summarizes the exchange in this week’s reading from Exodus 33 between Moses and God. I mean, Moses comes back from trying to right the wrong of the golden calf debacle and starts to carp at God: “You tell me, ‘Lead this people,’ that you know me well, and I’m special to you – but you don’t tell me what’s going to happen or give me a head’s up on what you’re planning to do. This is *your* people and *your* responsibility! If your presence isn’t going to take the lead here – just call this whole trip off right now!” And God replies, “My presence will go with you. I’ll see the journey to the end. You are special to me. I know you by name.” But was that ‘good enough’ for Moses? No. He pushes for more. It is pure *chutzpah* for Moses to say, “Please. Let me see your Glory.” Who does that?! Moses does that. But there is a limit to even Moses’ *chutzpah*. When God responded with a very detailed description of the absolute, ONLY way that Moses could ever remotely experience God’s glory and continue to live – even Moses knew he couldn’t press God for anything more than that because Moses probably *wanted* to continue living as much, or even more, than he desired to see God’s glory. So Moses accepted God’s response which went something like this, “Moses, if you’re going to get cheeky with me, I’ll get cheeky with you. I’ll only show you my backside. You won’t see my face.” Moses was reminded once again that it is God, not Moses, who sets the limits on what will be, and what will not be.

Moses’ *chutzpah* and faithfulness was employed by God, so that Moses could partially incarnate God’s justice and righteousness, but Moses could not embody the fullness of God’ glory and holiness – *he could not even see it and live*. But God blessed Moses with limited vision so that he could live. Think about that: God blessed Moses with limited vision so that he could live. . . . When someone tells us we’ll have limited access to something – what do we immediately think? NO! We don’t want to be limited! We want to decide what our own limits are! We want to have that control. We want the freedom to decide that for ourselves. . . . But what if we were plainly told that we would die if our access wasn’t limited? Would that make a difference? I’m afraid we’d still question the limitation. We’d still want to see proof. We’d still have to be convinced. . . . I say that

because – well, isn't that what we've been doing for the past six or seven months? We've been told that if we want to live we need to wear face masks in public; practice social distancing; be vigilant about washing our hands and sanitizing surfaces; and to stay home as much as possible if we want to flatten the curve and limit the spread of COVID-19 infections and death. . . . And still we push against those limits, don't we? Because we want to set the limits on what will be, and what will not be! We don't want to believe that we're not in control. It seems like we've been displaying our own misguided *chutzpah* about COVID-19, haven't we? And now our hospital systems are overburdened because of it.

But it's not just our *chutzpah* about COVID-19. This seems to be our attitude about everything: Don't tell us what to do! . . . And that's problematic for us as people of faith. This attitude tends to put us at odds with God. And I think it has been uncomfortable for us to hear the readings from the Book of Exodus. To hear how God presented the people with the gift of the ten commandments; and forty days later the people turned to a golden calf and endorsed it as their new deity. It's not comfortable for us to hear how these people of faith were given the ten commandments to help them live well, and yet they rejected the commandments as being too limiting. That they'd rather be in control of deciding what they would or wouldn't do. . . . That sounds uncomfortably familiar, doesn't it? So what do we as people of faith do with our discomfort? Do we just ignore it and carry on? That's the *chutzpah* way, isn't it? . . . But how does God deal with our impudence; our gall; our brazen nerve; our insolence; our arrogant self-confidence; our audacity; and our cheekiness?

God blesses us with limited vision so that we can live. And like Moses, we need to learn how to appreciate this blessing. We need to understand that God has found a place – right beside God – where we can stand, solid and sure upon the rock. And when God needs to, God will cover us with God's hand, while the fullness of God's glory moves on ahead of us. And when it's safe God will pull God's hand away so we can catch a glimpse of the glory ahead of us. Because there isn't anything else that will convince us that God is greater than we are, and that God is in control and we aren't.

We are slow to learn that we are blessed with limited vision. And we come from a people who, for generations, have been slow to learn that they were blessed with limited vision. But the good news is that we can still learn. And as the writer of Psalm 99 puts it:

*O LORD our God, you answered them;  
you were a forgiving God to them,  
but an avenger of their wrongdoings.*     *Psalm 99:8 NRSV*

May God also answer us, forgive us, and avenge our wrongdoings so that we may live.

Amen.