

**Exodus, 17:1-7; Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16; Philippians 2:1-13; Matthew 21:23-32  
18th Sunday after Pentecost A; 10.01.23; G. Miles Smith+**

*Have you ever felt like God reached right into your life...and gave you something you really needed?*

Was it a love? A profession? A new job? A new place to live? A recovery from sickness? Children... grandchildren?... It may have been something you already knew you wanted. Or even if you didn't know you wanted it--you could recognize it when you received it! *It was a clear gift. And a connection with God was tangible in your experience.*

The Bible would call that kind of experience *a wonderful...mighty...work of God*. And there are such key moments like that referred to in the stories of the Bible: *God's covenant with Abraham, the Exodus from Egypt, the Ten Commandments, the wandering Israelites finding their homeland, and God's covenant with King David*. And in the New Testament it would especially be *the appearances to the disciples of Jesus resurrected*. The biblical sensibility of God pivots around these times when...the experience of Israel...and the disciples of Jesus...was *that God reached right into the life of the world and into their lives and something wonderful happened...*

And then, of course, there are all the other times *in-between* the wonderful and the mighty works of God. And it can seem like it is just us doing our own thing in the world...trying to make the best of things. And in times like that--if we can have the presence of mind to recall our own experiences of God--those memories could leave us wondering if we are now alone--in those in-between times. The contrast between the wonderful--and the seemingly ordinary--can feel disorienting.

But even when the New Testament talks about the great work of God in Jesus, there is a very crucial pivot in how the “wonderful” and “mighty” are seen...that makes a difference in how we may be able to see God in our lives during the long in-between times. This is alluded to in the Collect of the Day where we prayed that *God declares almighty power...chiefly in showing mercy and pity*. And the apostle Paul talks about the fact that what is really so miraculous about Jesus is *that God humbled himself to become human and live among us. This can change the way we may see God in our lives.*

*When we look back over our lives and think about when we have had vivid experiences...of mercy, humility, and love...what would those be?* Is it a memory of a tenderness from your mother? A moment when you felt close to your father? A time when a teacher, or a friend, noticed you, and helped you with something you didn't even know you needed until you had received it? Was it when someone went out of their way just for you? And not just what we have *received* like that—but when have we *given* like that--when you yourself went out of the way just for someone else? And what about the times when you weren't even thinking about being obedient to God *but in fact were--when you tried to do the right thing even when it was hard?*

To know something of Jesus...is to be given an unexpected possibility of being able to see *our lives* like that...not only to notice the wonderful and mighty works of God...but the quiet, very personal, experiences...of mercy, humility, and love...received and given...where God is too.