

## **God’s Empowering Presence**

**Good morning church.** It is good to be back with you.

In case you are new or have simply been caught up with **other** things, 5 of us (myself included) returned 9 days ago from an incredible journey – with **Food for the Hungry** Canada – to visit our friends and partners in the **Sasiga Mid-Highlands** of western **Ethiopia**.

Like the rest of the team, I think I feel **MOSTLY** back to normal, physically, but still early in the journey of **processing** the whole experience and what it means.

If you are able to be with us in two weeks (June 23<sup>rd</sup>), we will do our best to share some pictures, videos, stories, to introduce you to a few of our Ethiopian friends and unpack some of what we experienced.

Suffice it to say: thank you for supporting and **entrusting us** to go as representatives of Lambrick. To **be** the face and hands, the heart and feet of Lambrick to FH Ethiopia and the people of the Sasiga Mid-highlands...

This was a great honor and **a holy task**.

Day after day, we were awakened to the power of **Presence**.

**Being Present with the people and the FH team...**

Day after day, we were awakened to the reality that **Presence**

**Matters.**

Being **with** someone – another – or a group of people.

Being **WITH** the people of the Sasiga Midhighlands – **matters**.

Here and there someone asks, “Well, what did you **do**?” Consciously or unconsciously conveying that **doing** something is what makes the trip worth it. But the real doing is what **THEY** are doing – and our **presence** has *an amazing capacity* to **encourage** and **empower** them in all **they are doing**. ***More than we’d ever expect.***

Honestly, ***algorithms can release funds*** at the right time.

***Algorithms can even compose and send letters.*** (I’m pretty sure I had a long and drawn out conversation – via text – with a computer from Shaw telecommunications the other day. They never said it, but it sure felt like it – despite the liberal use of appropriately-placed emoticons).

But ***showing up!*** There is something undeniably meaningful and powerful to **showing up! Being with! Being present with...!**

Day after day, we witnessed first-hand how the **PRESENCE** of FH – the Food for the Hungry team in Sasiga – has ***a transforming, empowering, life-altering impact*** on the lives of children and families, women and men, and whole communities.

And our ongoing partnership helps them **be there**.

**Presence Matters.**

I read a line this week that says it so well.

***“Presence is a delicious word.”***

**“Presence is a delicious word** - ***because it points to one of our truly greatest gifts. Nothing else can take the place of presence, not gifts, not telephone calls, not pictures, not mementos, nothing. Ask the person who has lost a lifelong mate what they miss the most; the answer is invariably***

'presence.' When we are ill, we don't need soothing words nearly as much as we need loved ones to be present. What makes shared life—games, walks, concerts, outings, and a myriad of other things—so pleasurable? **Presence.**" (Gordon Fee, p.9)

And specifically, what our heart **longs for** is the Presence of another who **knows** us and **cares** about us. Who **loves** us, even!

And, truth is, this isn't just something we felt profoundly in our recent time in Ethiopia, but this is exactly where we find ourselves **in the Story of** the Exodus this morning – in our **final Sunday** in Exodus. This is where the Story of Exodus **concludes** – with God's Presence drawing near... With God Himself coming to fill the Tabernacle – to **be with** Israel.

Let me read the short, but landmark scene for us.

**Exodus 40:34-38**

And before I do, let me simply remind us that this scene follows chapter after chapter of instructions for building the Tabernacle, and the Israelites actually building the Tabernacle, and Moses' inspecting the building of the Tabernacle... There is a reason why many of us never get this far in our reading of Exodus – because after chapter 24, the narrative of Exodus no longer feels like a narrative. We often experience it as painfully repetitive and focused on seemingly unnecessary minutia.

As Glen stated a few weeks back – it would be understandable to expect Exodus to conclude in Exodus 24 with the Covenant. Israel has been rescued from Egypt, brought to Mt. Sinai, received the gift of the Law (the

Ten Commandments and the Book of the Law), and then has entered into covenant with God.

It would make sense for Exodus to end there...

But the Story doesn’t end there. **Because God is after more than the Law and the Covenant. God wants to dwell with His people!**

**And that’s what the tabernacle is all about!**

So, in **Exodus 40:34-38**, we read...

*Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD [YAHWEH] filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD [YAHWEH] filled the tabernacle.*

*(v.36) In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the LORD [YAHWEH] was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels.”*

Unlike some Old Testament books (and New Testament books, for that matter), Exodus concludes in a way that feels like an ending. A good ending even. A conclusion. There’s a sense of resolution.

But we need to understand that it’s not just an ending or a conclusion. It is, in truth, the **fulfillment** of God’s **goal from the start**... the fulfillment of God’s goal in the **Exodus**... The fulfillment of God’s **goal for the Israelites**...

And in that, it is **a picture, a revelation**, of God’s goal and dream and pursuit for **us – for all of us**. For you. For me. It is a glimpse of what God has made us for...

That we would **know**.... That we would **experience LIFE together in the Empowering Presence of God...**

In truth, **this is why loneliness hurts so much** – and plagues so many. So many of us.

Loneliness is such a common human experience in a fallen world. Many would describe our day as marked by **epidemic loneliness**. And it feels so true.

And **it hurts so much** because **we were made to know and experience life in the loving fellowship of God and one another.**

We were made to experience **life together in God’s Presence – life together with God... to be alive together in God’s Presence.**

Which is what we see happening in Exodus 40.

As not just the **conclusion** of the story, but as the **goal** – as the event – the reality – the grace – that everything in Exodus has been working toward.

Two times in the opening part of our passage we hear these words –  
“And the **glory** of the LORD filled the tabernacle...”

**“Then the cloud covered** the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”

What does this mean?

How are we to make sense of this? What does it mean for “*the glory of the LORD to fill the tabernacle*”?

First of all, ***what is God’s glory?***

And second, ***how can God’s glory FILL the tabernacle?***

O man, you are asking big questions today!!! 😊

I’ll do my best!

Well, first let’s talk about **God’s glory**.

And I’ll say, right away, the concept and reality of **God’s glory** is both a very simple thing and one of the grandest mysteries we could consider.

And I mean that.

So let me start with the simple part.

Simply put: **God’s GLORY refers to the revelation or manifestation** of who God is!

Let me say that again – ***God’s GLORY refers to the revelation or manifestation of who God is!***

Which means, God’s glory isn’t itself a **facet** of God’s character – as much as it is itself the **revelation of** God’s character...

The revelation of God’s **Holiness**... of God’s **Love**... of God’s **Justice** and **Mercy** and **Compassion**... And **Sovereignty** and **Power**... And more.

Exodus 33:18 – Moses asks God, “**Show me your glory!**”

And in response, **Exodus 34:5-6,**

*Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses,*

*proclaiming, 'The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin...'*

***This is God’s GLORY! It is the revelation or manifestation of who God is!***

It isn’t **another facet** of God’s character – as much as it is the

**revelation of God’s character... *The revelation of all that God is!***

Now, in truth, I think sometimes, we use the word “glory” as another term to describe God – but biblically, glory, is the word that speaks of the **revelation** of all that God is.

Which, although profound and mysterious, is something that I think many of us **have experienced** at times.

In truth, if you are a Christian – of you are a follower and worshipper of God in Christ – if you have ever heard God speaking to you through scripture or community, or been drawn to worship or trust God – it is because ***YOU have caught a glimpse of who God is through what He has done.***

Which means: **You’ve experienced God’s glory!**

Which also means: **You’ve experienced God’s PRESENCE!**

***Because only God can reveal God’s GLORY!***

And we need to ***take this to heart*** – those of us who are tempted at times to measure our spirituality ***in contrast to*** Moses or Exodus 40.

Whether or not you have ever stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai, if you have ever found your heart turned toward God in worship and trust, if you have ever experienced conviction of sin and a hunger for repentance, if you have ever experienced the peace of God or a desire for more of God – then ***you have experienced God’s GLORY*** – which means ***you have experienced God’s PRESENCE!***

In truth, in grace, I think we could say we’ve experienced something of **God’s glory** through this study in the Book of Exodus this year. As, here or there, or maybe again and again, we’ve caught a glimpse of the beauty of who God is and how He is toward us.

If that’s happened, it is because ***we’ve experienced God’s glory*** – the revelation of who God is!

***Which is important for us to realize.*** Because many of us, maybe most of us, don’t have an obvious Exodus 40 experience – a moment in our lives when we found ourselves in some place ***filled with the glory of God.***

But in the mystery of God’s grace, the Exodus story invites to celebrate that God’s GLORY doesn’t just show up in Exodus 40, but God’s GLORY comes at **many** turns – in all sorts of situations and trials, experiences of profound highs, devastating blows, and even in the midst of the deeply mundane.

In truth, we’ve experienced something of God’s glory in the darkness of Egypt (Exodus 1-2), in the call of Moses at the Burning Bush (Exodus 3),



in the plagues of judgment against Egypt and their gods (Exodus 7-11), in the wilderness (Exodus 16-18), in the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20), in the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 21-23), and even in 7 chapters of instructions for building the Tabernacle and preparing the priests (Exodus 25-31).

Again and again, in the mystery of God’s rescuing grace, **God has showered us with GLORY** – in EXODUS – the revelation of who God is!

Which means, God has been **WITH US** – in and through this study. What a gift of grace. Grace we need!

Ok, so how are we to make sense of what happens in this final scene in Exodus? Where we’re told (twice) that **“the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”**

What does it mean that the glory of the LORD **filled** the tabernacle?

Well, simply put: **I have no idea!** :)

But I also have no idea how God sometimes takes the simple, human act of preaching and makes it the means of His Life-Altering, Life-Giving revelation to another! Or to me!

But in the mystery of grace, this is what our God does. Our God is a God who reveals His glory!

Truly, the conclusion of Exodus **IS** a mystery of grace – **but so is the rest of the story.** So is Israel’s rescue from Egypt. So is the judgment of

Pharaoh. So is God’s revelation in the Burning Bush, and God’s provision in the wilderness, and the courage of two midwives (in Exodus 1) who defy the Pharaoh and help the Hebrew slaves give birth to sons...

Life with God is **ALWAYS** a mystery of grace – chock full of glimpses of **God’s Glory**, and empowered by **God’s Presence** – in the midst of all that life brings.

*“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”*

As I said at the start, this incredible gift of God’s Glorious Presence isn’t just the conclusion of story. It is, in fact, the **GOAL** of the story – of Exodus... It’s **God’s** goal. It is **the goal of our salvation**.

As Tim Chester beautifully states it:

**"The glory is the climax of the tabernacle; and it's the climax of the story of the Exodus.** God has rescued his people from slavery and death so that they can enjoy his presence and see his glory. Everything so far has been leading up to this moment. **Of all the blessings God gives** (and there are many), this is the greatest: **God himself, in his glory**. And this is the promise given to us in the gospel of the tabernacle: one day in a new creation **we will eternally enjoy God in his glory**.

**"The tabernacle was a taste of God's glory.** The new creation will be **its eternal fulfillment**.

**In the end and at the end,** what we get from God is God." (Chester, 260)

Oh, I love that last line. Because it is the answer to our deepest need.

“In the end and at the end, what we get from God is God.”

Not just life in Canaan, of life beyond slavery. But what we get is God Himself – God with us – **wherever we are**...

Thank God! Because life in Canaan for the Israelites will have many challenges – not the least of which is their own idolatrous hearts. And what they will need – above all – is **God with them**. Wherever they go. Wherever they are. Whatever is to come.

Which is what God wants. And how Exodus truly ends.

*(v.36f) In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the LORD [YAHWEH] was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels.”*

In a way, this ending is voiced as something of a new beginning. Isn’t it? A new beginning of a new chapter – **with God** – into whatever is to come.

And it comes as something of an invitation to Israel – **AND TO US** – to stay attentive and responsive to God’s leading in our lives – to go where God goes, and to remain where God remains...

***Where is God inviting us to slow down and put down roots?***

***Where is God inviting us to remain with Him? And where is God inviting us to go – to move – to join Him in a new adventure?***

***But before we’re done, we need to name the one part of this last scene that isn’t yet what it’s supposed to be.***

It’s easy to read this last passage of this beautiful and perfect climax – **but it’s not**. Because something’s missing. Something isn’t yet the way it’s supposed to be.

God’s Presence has now come to be with God’s people in the Tabernacle – **but Moses can’t get in!**

Do you see this?

Let me read the opening verses to us **one more time**.

**Exodus 40:34-35.**

*Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD [YAHWEH] filled the tabernacle. **Moses could not enter the tent of meeting** because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD [YAHWEH] filled the tabernacle.*

The emphasis is clearly on “*the glory of the LORD filling the tabernacle!*” But the text is also clear that **Moses can’t enter in**.

Which could be interpreted as just the incredible result of God’s Presence in the Tabernacle being **so powerful, so glorious!** Which wouldn’t surprise us. The text somewhat leads us that way.

But the larger story of Exodus and the Old Testament tells us that this alone isn’t all that’s going on. Because **the whole purpose** of the Tabernacle was to be the place *where God would meet with His people*.

As God promised in **Exodus 29:43** – “*There I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated with my glory.*”

But here – in Exodus 40 – in the final scene of Exodus – **Moses can’t enter in. He can’t meet with God...**

Which must have been **hard news** – for Moses and for the Israelites.

And maybe for us.

And yet ***there is actually incredibly good news here.***

Because although Exodus 40 may be the end of Exodus, it is not ***the end of the Story.***

Because God is not done. There is more that God will do... for Israel and for us.

In truth, Exodus is a Story waiting for an Ending – waiting for its Completion!

A completion that finally comes in and through Jesus – in and through the life, death, resurrection, ascension and glorious reign of **Jesus.**

The perfect and complete fulfillment of what we heard from Tim Chester earlier – “**In the end and at the end, what we get from God is God.**”

And today – in the Christian calendar – is the celebration of what more God has done and is doing. As Simon announced earlier – today is Pentecost – the day that marks and celebrates that God has come to dwell with us forever by the Spirit – and that by the Spirit, the Rescuing God of Exodus continues to be with us and to be at work in us and among us, and in the world – seeking to rescue and redeem slaves and idolaters to know life together in the Empowering Presence of GOD!!!

Oh, our journey in Exodus may be complete – but the God of Exodus is not done. **Thank God...**

And we need to take this to heart today – each of us... Because this is good news that many of us need to hear!

***The story of God’s rescuing grace in our world and in our lives isn’t over.***

The Story of God’s rescuing grace in our world and in our lives ***isn’t over.***

*Like the Israelites in Exodus 40, we are a people to whom God has come, and yet who, at times, can’t seem to enter in.*

*Like the Israelites in Exodus 40, we are a people who have been rescued from so much, and yet who know there is still so much in us to be redeemed and consecrated for God’s glory.*

*And so, like the Israelites in Exodus 40, this story concludes with an invitation to walk forward with **hope** that **God isn’t done...***

And to let this **hope** lead us to lean in again and again to our Rescuing God, to pay attention to His Presence and Glory and Voice – and to follow as He leads us... to remain where He remains, and to go where He leads us...

***Into the Rescuing grace of our God...***

Let’s pray.