



Twenty fourth Sunday Ordinary Time

Exodus 32: 7-14 1Timothy 1:12-17 Luke 15: 1-11 (shorter form)

The first reading is from the book of Exodus. You may remember that there are two great tribal strands underpinning the Torah, the five books that the Jewish people call The Law. The two strands are discernible because the tribes had differing ways of naming and picturing God.

One group called God, Elohim. God was described as a great king, powerful and mighty, before whom the people felt small, humble but protected. The other group called God, Yahweh. God was like a friend, a helper, someone who understood their needs.

That is why when we read the stories God seems so changeable, one minute God is talking about ordinary everyday things in an intimate way then almost in the next paragraph God appears remote and transcendent. The two traditions are a constant reminder that God cannot be contained by our perceptions.

Listening to this section from Exodus we overhear a conversation between God and Moses. God is angry and Moses is trying to Get God to cool down. At first we may be shocked. We think it appropriate if Moses was losing his temper and God was calling him to order.

The ancient people knew that God loved them so they expected that God would get angry when the people did things that no friend would do. Moses was angry when the people he had put so much energy into rescuing, were ungrateful. Moses couldn't believe it when the moment his back was turned they started creating a golden calf, one of the principal images of the Canaanite deity. Moses thought, "If I'm angry the God must be furious, how will I stop God from killing them?"

Like a friend, Moses comes between God and the sinful people. He asks God to remember that not everyone is involved in the wickedness. He reminds God that God has faithful friends when are thankful to have been guided safely through the desert. And like a good friend Moses goes so far as to remind God that if he does something he might regret God could lose face. The story ends with God deciding not to punish his people.

What an extraordinary story! It tells us so much about how our ancestors saw themselves in relation to God. Moses saw himself, not as child of God, but partner of God. When the people looked at Moses they knew he took his friendship with God seriously and so they tried to learn from him.

When people met Jesus they recognised the same close friendship with God. In fact they came to recognise that between God and Jesus was something closer than friendship. Like Moses, Jesus encouraged the people to see that friendship with God was available to all.

In the Gospel reading we hear Jesus describing God in very comforting terms. First as a farmer who cares for his stock and works hard for their well-being.

He also calls God a housewife who is upset by the loss of even a small amount of money and will keep searching till it's found.

Do we see God as a true friend, someone to whom we really matter?

Patricia Stevenson rsj.