

Sermon 16th March 2014 – Encountering God

Genesis 32:22-32 and John 18:28 –end.

This is the second in the series of sermons on encountering God, to which there is no single answer because I suspect that if I asked you individually you would all come up with a different answer. Some will say it was on such and such day or others will say it was gradual, as it was for me or even I saw the light, heard voices and knew it was God. I have to say that when I was preparing this sermon it continually raised one question for me. It was about my continuing encounter God in my life, it certainly made me think and I hope it will make you think about your encounter or relationship with God.

When I read the two readings for today I naturally saw Jacobs encounter with God, in the reading from Genesis but the more I looked at and thought about the reading from John I was struck that there was also an encounter with God in that reading. So I am going to start with the Gospel Reading and try to explain why I think there's an encounter with God.

I think that Pilate encountered God through Jesus when he was questioning him. Pilate says in verse 37, in response to Jesus' answer to his question 'Are you the King of the Jews Pilate said 'You are a king, then. Jesus answered 'You are right in saying I am a king. In fact for this reason I was born.' Jesus the son of God was sent to earth in human form to testify the truth and to preach the word of the Lord and to save the world. The kingdom referred to is part of Gods kingdom not some earthly kingdom; if Jesus had claimed an earthly kingdom Pilate as Roman Governor would have had him executed any way as a threat to the Roman Empire. I think from the tone of Pilate's questions that Pilate must have realised that here was someone - Jesus – who had been sent by God not man. Pilate I believe encountered God through Jesus but chose to ignore it and hand over Jesus for crucifixion to the Jews who also refused to encounter God through his son Jesus Christ. As an aside I do wonder what would have happened if the Jews and Pilate had accepted Jesus as the Messiah, there's probably a Book or books about that question!

How often then do people hear about the work of Jesus or 'the truth' as Jesus says in verse 37 but still refuse to listen, believe and therefore encounter God?

They ignore an encounter with God, like Pilate and the Jews, and carry on. Similarly how often do you choose not to listen to God in all the things you do? The encounter with God is not a 'one of' in my opinion; it is a continuing presence or encounter that starts when you turn to Christ and start a new life and this must then continue throughout your Christian life with God. Yes there will be times when you are down or need help or even reassurance but then you need to talk to God, to continue to encounter God who will respond in His way to you; remember it is us who turn our backs on God never ever the other way round.

Let's now look at Jacob; Jacob was one of the twin sons of Isaac. Being the second born he would not inherit his father's estate, his brother Esau would inherit as the first born. But Jacob stole Esau's inheritance and then ran away because Esau was not, naturally, best pleased. However, Jacob eventually decided to make his peace with Esau but he was afraid of Esau's reaction so what did Jacob do? He prayed to God {READ 32: 9 TO 12}. This is an example for all of us; when in doubt or despair give it to the Lord in prayer and meet and continue to encounter God in that moment as well as in all the good times.

Then Jacob encountered God in what we might think is in a very strange way. Look at the reading from Genesis, he wrestled with Him – Jacob refused to stop until Jacob received a blessing from God. Verse 26 God says 'LET ME GO FOR IT IS DAYBREAK.' God gives Jacob the option to let him, God, go but Jacob refuses. God has given each of us free will, to choose. Do you let God go? How often in your life do you choose not to encounter God? Having turned to God I repeat the encounter should be continuous. In verse 30 it says 'SO JACOB CALLED THE PLACE PENIEL, SAYING IT IS BECAUSE I SAW GOD FACE TO FACE AND YET MY LIFE WAS SPARED.' Having encountered or met God face to face, Jacob was able to move on in his life.

Now physically wrestling to with God in my opinion is a no go area but I know from personal experience that I have on occasions wrestled with God usually when God wants me to do something and I don't want to do it or when I am studying Scripture and either disagree with it or do not understand it. What normally happens is I get angry with God; now there is nothing wrong with this

provided of course after venting ones anger you seek Gods meaning or implement what God wants thus continuing your encounter with God!

So do you wrestle with God or put another way do not understand what He wants from you? Take an example from Jacob and seek Gods will in everything and I mean everything you do and then accept it and move on and your life will change. Jacob was reconciled with Esau because he encountered God, trusted in Him and sought his counsel or guidance through prayer as to his eventual reconciliation with his brother Esau. That message or example is still there for you and me today – don't let anyone tell you the Old Testament is not relevant to today's modern world, this passage and the example of encountering God proves it is and is I repeat an example for you and me in our Christian lives today. Therefore through prayer, study of the Bible and Jesus' teachings and acceptance of what God wants means that God, His Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit will be with you and continue your encounter with God now and for evermore.

Just to prove that the Old Testament is relevant today I want to finish with a short Psalm; Psalms are a virtual treasure chest and I would recommend you read them. Psalm 4; this is about rejoicing in Gods protection and peace and when we place our confidence in God He will listen when we call upon Him.

{READ PSALM 4}.