

## **“Hiding under a Rock can be a Good Thing”**

Texts: *[God said to Moses,] “When my glory passes by, I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by.”*

-- Exodus 33:23 NIV

*“We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

-- 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 NRSV



Image Credit: *“God Passes By”*, by Richard McBee, 2006, [www.richardmcbec.com](http://www.richardmcbec.com).

In searching for a picture that might help us understand the Scripture lesson for today, I found various kinds of images of clefts in the rock. The one above, by the artist Andrew McBee, entitled *“God Passes By”*, caught my attention especially. As you look closely, the light of God’s glory is illuminating the tall rock face behind Moses; the light source is coming from in front of Moses. Moses is depicted as turning his head to look. One could imagine but moments before Moses’ face buried in his folded arms, leaning into the cleft of the rock, but now as *“God passes by”*, he turns to see God’s glory.

*“See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; 22and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; 23then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.”*

That is what I see in this intriguing painting by Andrew McBee. I am glad I found his work to share with you this way.

Let us pray: Our Father and our God make us masters of ourselves that we may become the servants of others. Take my lips and speak through them; take our minds and think through them; take our hearts and set them on fire, for we would see Jesus this morning, in his name and for his sake, we pray, Amen.

I don't know about you, but there have been a lot of times in my life when I have wanted to hide under a rock:

- ❖ Forgetting an appointment with someone;
- ❖ Forgetting the same appointment – again for the second time. . .
- ❖ Standing in the seventh tee box and sending your powerful drive three yards to the right of the women's tee. . . on the ninth;
- ❖ Realizing that there is toilet paper stuck on the bottom of your shoe after you see everyone else in the restaurant looking at your feet;
- ❖ Saying what you said about your boss, or your teacher or your neighbor to your friend not knowing your boss or your teacher or your neighbor was standing behind you.
- ❖ Going to a party you thought was Tuesday at 7 and realizing from their looks that the party was Monday at 8;
- ❖ Pulling up to the exact change basket-lane on a crowded interstate and handing a twenty to absolutely no one;

I suppose there are any numbers of times when we have wanted to hide under a rock – I'm sure you could come up with a few examples yourself – yes?

There are those times when, for one reason or another, we have been told that we looked like we had just climbed out from under a rock. This particular expression is never said in compliment, but rather to underscore how bad our form is – our looks or our behavior comes to mind.

No, when it comes to rocks, it is usually something bad that makes us want to hide behind them or under them and the last thing on our minds is a vision of the glory of God; hiding under a rock is a very inglorious activity for most of us.

But here in Exodus 33, Moses gets the tables turned on embarrassment and is instead given a glimpse of God’s glory so wonderful and powerful that the rock of hiding, the Rock of Ages, cleft for him, is meant for a different purpose: far from embarrassment or ridicule or self-deprecation, Moses’ cleft in the Rock was meant to give him a sense of safety and comfort – for who in the created order can look full in the face the pure glory of God?

C. S. Lewis called glory a “weight” – derived from the Hebrew word for glory – a heaviness that we are not fully capable of carrying, or seeing, this side of glory, we’re not tough enough or pure enough in our own merit or goodness, or worthiness to stand in such a shining splendor. He once said that it is not mere mortals that we joke with, or laugh with, or make fun of, or dislike or snub because next to the Blessed Sacrament itself – Jesus, our friend and brother – the holiest object presented to our senses is our neighbor. And were we privileged to see our neighbor as they will be in glory some day, right now, we would be strongly tempted to fall at their feet and worship them right now. That is the weight of glory that is daily hoisted onto our backs in how we treat our brother and sister on earth – they are not mere mortals, but, in God’s sight, they are everlasting splendors.<sup>i</sup> That is why the command to love one another is such a vital part of our common life in Christ, because that is how God sees all of us – even when we look as though we had just crawled out from underneath a rock, or feel like burying ourselves under one.

Such was the glory that God permitted Moses to see-in-part, because the fullness of God’s glory-brightness; his splendid face, was too much for any mortal eye to see, even one who had no reason for embarrassment, for Moses was God’s steadfast and devout servant. In his

case, hiding under a rock was a good thing, for it enabled him to see the realness of God at work in a world that was a bit confusing and troubled for him.

For all his goodness and steadfastness, Moses was having a crisis of confidence. He had led the people out of Egypt, but he felt very much alone. He wanted some kind of insurance, some kind of proof that what he was doing -- and what the people he led were doing -- was unique and special; he wanted to be assured of God's presence in a world that seemed to lack it wherever he looked:

*“If your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth? – After all, he had said a moment earlier, “Remember [God,] this nation is your people.”*

We look for assurance that the way we are going is God's way, but our vision is slight; not all that we see looks to us as infused with God's glory. No, most days in our Christian walk we'd rather hide under a rock; for the walk we walk is not the talk we talk, and the discrepancy we experience is the stuff of embarrassment to us; many days we feel as if we have let God down and failed the test of what it means to be faithful to him.

But here we have a different outcome – Even though Moses is feeling that there is not much that is different about him and all whom he leads from anybody else in the world, he gets more than he asked for – he gets to hide in the cleft of the rock so that he might glimpse the glory of God passing by and know without a doubt that God walks with him and all of them in a way that is wholly and holy different than anybody else's experience.

That is when hiding under a rock is a good thing, if it allows us to see God's glory passing by. And even when we crawl under a rock for reasons that aren't so holy, or good what if we were to look in earnest for God's glory to pass by in the worst of it? In the worst of what we are, in our own crises of confidence, in our own fear of failure?

The people that Paul wrote to in Thessalonica, were folks who daily found themselves in the thick of suffering – living in a world that was hard on Christians – and yet, they triumphed in such a manner that their work of faith, their labor of love and their steadfastness of hope was always on display in such a manner that others in other places were able to distinguish them and derive blessing for the journeys they had to endure.

The key to their ability to live the distinguishing marks of Christian faith, love and hope rested in the power of Christ that they embraced in a vision of glory passing by them and through them and in them for others. They hid themselves in Christ their Rock who enabled them to see the glory of God in all of the world they knew.

What would happen if today, instead of wringing your hands at all the times you fail to live up to the life you think God expects of you, you instead asked of him to reveal a little more of his glory to you where you are? Instead of living to hide yourself from God and one another, you instead asked to be hid in Christ for one another so that you might glimpse his glory passing by and ahead of you into the life he asks you to live? We are everlasting splendors because Christ the light of the glory of God shines in us and through us in order that we might shine like light for all to see. It is a weight of glory we bear with one another and for one another because God shows us his glory from the cleft of Christ our Rock – the Rock of Ages, cleft for you and me.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, 1949, New York: The Mac Millan Company; pp. 14-15.