"Then Moses said to him, “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?” (Ex 33:15-16) Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (John 20:21) Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations …And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:19-20)

In this last study in our series, we are exploring the name Emmanuel or God with us. We find this name in Is 7:14 and Matt 1:23, but the idea of God being present with his people is a theme that runs through both the Old and New Testaments. Ever since creation, God has sought to abide with and walk with his people. Even the exodus journey included tangible symbols of his presence. John Durham comments on Ex 33, that:

“Only Yahweh’s Presence with Moses and Israel separates them from all other people throughout the world. … No people, no matter how religious they are and for whatever reasons, can be a people of God without the Presence of God. Moses has posed the ultimate either/ or: Yahweh’s decision to withdraw his presence from Israel is the decision of Israel’s fate. Without Yahweh’s presence, in the dark and chaotic umbra of his Absence, Israel will cease to exist.”

ICEBREAKER: Is there a time when you felt God made his presence real to you? Has there been a time when you felt that God was absent from you? How did you feel during those times?

PRAY: Jesus, you have promised that where even just two or three are gathered, that you are in our midst. May we know your presence in this time together.

READ: Exodus 19:3-9; 32:30-33:6; 33:12-17

The passage from Exodus 19 provides the backdrop to today’s study. The people were encamped at the base of Mt Sinai, en route to the promised land. God intended his people to be the object, not merely of his care and protection, but also of massive blessing.

- In Ex 19:4, what picture is given of how God looks after his people?
- In Ex 19:5-6, what three titles did God want to endow on his people? What do these titles tell us about how God views and values his people? (These titles are also endowed on us, in 1 Pet 2:9)
- On the trip from Egypt, what physical signs indicated that God was guiding the people? (Ex 13:21-22)
- In Ex 16:8, what two things did God repeatedly provide for his people? What were these things meant to remind the people of? (Ex 16:6)

Prior to Exodus 19, there was primarily a relationship between Yahweh and Moses. In Ex 3:12, ‘God said (to Moses), “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”’

At Mt Sinai, we see the establishment of a covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people. God made promises to his people. He expected his people to trust him and to obey him. In Ex 24:3, we read that “When Moses went and told the people all the LORD’S words and laws, they responded with one voice, “Everything the LORD has said we will do.” God’s intention was always, that “They will be my people, and I will be their God” (Gen 17:8, Jer 24:7)

---

But, by Ex 32, the people had not only made, but also worshipped, an idol. This contravened both the commandments and the covenant. In Ex 32:30-33:6, God’s anger toward the people was palpable.

- In Ex 33:5, how did God now describe the people? How might God have outworked his anger to them?
- In Ex 33:2-3, what did God say he would do? What did God say he would not do?
- How did the people respond in Ex 33:4,6? Why?

In Ex 33:12-23, we get to eavesdrop on a rigorous conversation between God and Moses. Moses was not disrespectful towards God. But, neither did he want to be abandoned by God in the desert, with the thankless task of leading a group of whinging and recalcitrant nomads.

- READ Ex 33:12-14. What had God told Moses? What was still troubling Moses?
- What promises did God give to Moses?

READ Ex 33:15-17. Moses’ concerns had initially been for his own wellbeing. In these verses, he turns his concern to God going “with us”. He wanted God’s favour and blessing to not only rest on him, but also on the whole community. Without God’s presence, Israel would just become another group of nomadic people.

- Why did God change his mind, about his presence going with the people?

We have not read Ex 33:7-11 today. However, it provides important insights into the relationship between Yahweh and Moses. The ‘Tent of Meeting’ (or tabernacle) was an integral part of the Exodus journey. In these verses, the tent was the place where Moses communed with God, in the midst of the people. The presence of a ‘pillar of cloud’ over the tent sent the message that God was physically and tangibly present in their midst.

(Ex 19:9, 33:10) In Ex 25:1-9, part of the covenant stipulations was that the people needed to donate their valuables, then God commanded them to “make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.” (Ex 25:8)

- In Ex 33:10, how did the people respond, when they saw evidence of God’s presence with Moses?

In Ex 33:11, we’re told that “The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.” Central to the covenant was the relationship between God and his people. Obedience did not establish the relationship; obedience was meant to flow from and be the fruit of the relationship. When the people failed to prioritise their relationship with God, they were also apathetic and disinterested in the things that pleased God.

- Why did God change his mind, about his presence going with the people?

In the Old Testament, the tabernacle — and later, the temple — became symbols of God’s abiding presence, God’s indwelling presence and God’s empowering presence, with and among his people. The destruction of the temple and the exile of the people shook them, and they despaired that God had forsaken them. But, even in the discouragement of exile and returning to the land, to rebuild amidst the rubble, were words of encouragement, eg: “Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the LORD, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the LORD Almighty. … my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.’ (Hag 2:4-5)

READ: Matt 1:18-25. Joseph was fearful. His fiancée, Mary, was pregnant. It wasn’t his child.

- What did Joseph learn about this child, including his names, his paternity and his future role(s)?

Jesus has always existed (John 1:1-2), had an integral role in creation and is fully divine. He was (literally) ‘born of the Spirit’ (John 3:8) to a human mother. In John 1:14, we read that “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” He both embodied “Emmanuel, God with us” and fulfilled the creation of intent, of God walking with his people. Jesus becoming fully human not only helps us understand the nature of God, but demonstrated that God could enter into the full range of human experiences and emotions (except sin).

- What encouragement do you get, from knowing that God not only understands, but also wants to be with you in all the situations of life?

In 1 Cor 3:16, we are told that “you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you.” God not only comes near, abiding and dwelling with us, but now also indwells and empowers us, his people.

REFLECT & PRAY: God sends us into the world to make disciples, but also abides, indwells and empowers us, by his Spirit. Ask God to help you reflect his image and enable you with courage to make him known.

Springwood Baptist Church
Sermon Series – Names of God: Term 1 2017
Study 8: Emmanuel/ God with Us