

Sunday 26th December
St John

Exodus 33:1-11a
1 John 1
John 21:19b-end

I wonder if you have ever read passages from the Bible like that one we have just heard from the book of Exodus and wondered what it must have been like. I mean for Moses. *The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.*

What kind of relationship did Moses have with God? To speak to God face to face - like one speak to a friend. It must have been quite incredible. To be able to talk to God as if you were talking to a friend.

Moses was certainly an exceptional character. There are just a few others in the Old testament who had similar relationships with God. Abraham for one. We might recall the way he bargained with God in prayer over Sodom and Gomorrah. And he too was called the friend of God. We could probably name a couple of other Old Testament characters with a similar close relationship with God – David maybe and Samuel. But after that we'd begin to run out of ideas.

But why has that reading from Exodus about Moses been chosen as the OT reading for the feast day of St John – that we are celebrating today?

I think its probably to do with John being one of Jesus' closest friends. He was one of the inner core of disciples – Peter, James and John. But perhaps his relationship with Jesus was even closer than the others..

One of the interesting things about the gospel according to John is that it doesn't mention John by name at all. The only time in the gospel where its seems to be written in the first person is the passage we had this morning.

This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true. But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

But throughout the gospel there are references to 'the disciple Jesus loved' and it's widely assumed that this refers to John himself.

The disciple Jesus loved. It indicates a really close relationship with Jesus. With God in human form. Perhaps a bit like Moses' relationship with God in the OT.

I suspect each one of us had had friendships like that. Really close ones. You can share anything and be totally honest with each other. Perhaps you can even pick up what your friend is thinking before any words are said. Imagine having that kind of relationship with Jesus. With God.

Perhaps you see God as somewhat distant; a benevolent father figure up in heaven looking down on us; someone that we can perhaps pray to when things are rough and who might act to make things easier, but not much more than that.

Or perhaps you see God as an authority figure; one who sets rules for us to live by and stands ready to judge us, but who doesn't get involved in the routines of life. One who we are fearful of, one to whom we are afraid to admit what we are truly like.

Or maybe you see God as the creator, the one who set the world into being and now looks on from a distance but keeps his distance. One that you worship or acknowledge on Sundays, but who doesn't impact the rest of the week.

Maybe you find it hard to express exactly how you see God. It's most likely to be a combination of these and more.

Certainly none of these descriptions of God compares with the picture we have from Moses or John of a God who can be like a friend.

But friendship is what God offers us in the message of Christmas. God becoming one of us to live alongside us, as one of us. As John himself says at the start of his gospel, in the reading we had on Christmas Eve – the Word became flesh and lived among us, or as in The Message version of the Bible – The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood.

To face the same kinds of challenges that we face up to; to experience the same kinds of hurts and pains – as well as joys and celebrations – that we do. A

God who becomes one of us. A God we can relate to and be friends with. He is like someone who lives next door.

And we develop and nurture the relationship by spending time with him – just as we would spend time with a friend. Talking, listening, being aware of his presence. And just as our relationship with friends changes and develops over time depending on what we have experienced together and where we are in our lives, so our relationship – our friendship – with God can develop and grow over time.

These last couple of years have been the strangest of times. I am sure during them we have relied on those closest to us in a special way. Perhaps we have found new ways of keeping those relationships and friendships alive; maybe when we couldn't meet face to face we have met through video calls, phone calls, messages or emails. Its those friendships that have kept us going.

We might wonder exactly what the year ahead holds for us. More uncertainty perhaps; more worries, more concerns. The good news is that in Jesus we are offered the opportunity to have a similarly close relationship, friendship with God himself. The baby of Bethlehem grows up to be the man full of wisdom – Jesus – God himself in human form. And he wants to be that close and special friend to you.

Alongside you, involved in every moment and every detail of your life, at hand through good times and bad times. A God who will speak to you as and listen to you as you speak and listen to your best friend.

This is the God that Moses knew and called a friend; this is the Jesus – God with us - that John knew and was loved by. This is the God who can be your friend, who can be your companion, who can be your strength and help and inspiration and guide through the new year and the rest of your life.

You can – if you wish – join me now to ask him to be that friend for you.