

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23

EXODUS 15:1-18, ISAIAH 40:9-31

Many times, when we think about holiness, we begin by thinking of moral actions. However, holiness is part of God's existential nature, and therefore it cannot be a moral attribute of God, as if God could choose whether or not to be holy (or to behave morally) at any given time. In fact, questioning the morality of God is the beginning of pride and can lead to idolatry. When we look to the Bible, God's holiness is not contingent upon God's righteousness or morality. God's righteousness flows out of God's identity as the holy God, just as our righteousness should flow out of the fact that God has made us a holy people. In Exodus 15 we find a song of Moses praising God after he has brought them out of Egypt and saved them from the pursuing Egyptian army. In verse 11 Moses gives a triad that moves from God's holiness to God's glory to God's actions. It is clear from this passage (among others) that God's holiness is revealed not in God's ethics or morality but in how God is set apart from all creation. There is no one like God; that is the point of Moses's song. Notice that verse 11 begins not with the wonders that God works, nor the glory that God has, but with God's holiness.

God's holiness means that we cannot put God in a box; we cannot think God should work or think the way that we would. Isaiah 40 several times reminds us of this fact. The prophet tells us that no one has understood the mind of God or instructed God. Isaiah also says "no one can fathom" God's understanding. There is no one who can compare to God, because God is above all of creation; God is set apart; God is holy.

Do we actually view God this way? If we are being truly honest, then we would say, "not often enough." Many times it feels as if we have God figured out; we don't act or talk like we cannot fathom the understanding of God. Instead, we discuss the minutiae of what God has done and how God works, as if God were a machine, computer program, or math formula. When we do this, we forget God's holy nature. We turn God from the creator of the universe into some sort of celestial vending machine. Since we can only understand what God has revealed to us, we will have to wait until eternity to comprehend God fully - including God's holiness.

May we be a people who acknowledge that God knows and understands things that we cannot here on earth. May we be a people who embrace the mystery of a loving God. May we be a people who revel in the scandal of a holy God who became one of us, lived, died, and was resurrected for the forgiveness of our sins. May we never take our relationship with our holy creator for granted.