

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

PILGRIM PEOPLE
serving God
by serving others

JANUARY 2021

A MESSAGE FROM PASTOR NERSES BALABANIAN

Exodus 33:12-19

Happy New Year!
Shnorhavor Nor Daree!

It is an Armenian tradition to celebrate the New Year's Eve with the whole family and make good wishes. Growing up, I used to wait for that night. Santa would arrive from Ararat, and along with many gifts, he would bring us news

from Armenia. We would all listen to him attentively and pray for our homeland Armenia. At midnight, we used to turn off the lights, sing Hayr Mer (the Lord's Prayer) and give each other New Year's wishes.

There are people who think that if the first day of the year goes well, the whole year will. Some gamble to check their luck in the coming year. Many people who are curious about the future go to fortune tellers or read their books. These are only myths and mean nothing. They are not biblical, actually even satanic.

I will look to the Bible for guidance. Word of God has guided people in history and will guide us today in 2021. Today I will concentrate on Moses and the Israelites.

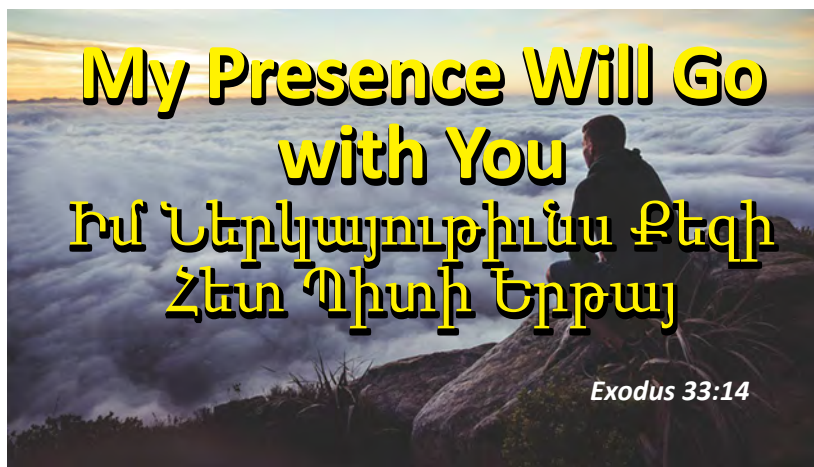
God Guiding Moses:

Exodus 33

¹²Moses said to the Lord, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' ¹³If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people."

¹⁴The Lord replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

¹⁵Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. ¹⁶How 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?"

¹⁷And the Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." (Exodus 33:12-17 NIV 11)

• Moses was tired. Moses faced challenges from the people he was

leading when they made and worshiped a golden calf, when they grumbled, when they kept questioning if God was with them or not. On the other hand, Moses had a promise from God that He was going to take them to the Promised Land.

Things went out of hand (please read Exodus chapters 31-32), and now God is sending them to the Promised Land with an angel to lead them and not God himself. (Exodus 33:1-3).

Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people... (Exodus 33:3 NIV 11)

Sometimes I feel our world makes us "**stiff-necked**" people, which means people who will not seek God's will in their lives. They won't trust God. Stubborn...

• Moses got scared. Am I going alone? Are people coming with me? Why an angel? Why not God?

Moses said to the Lord, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' (Exodus 33:12 NIV11)

Moses wants some certainty that the LORD will still protect them, not him alone, the Lord will be with them (13-15)

Moses speaking to God:

If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people. (Exodus 33:13 NIV11)

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My Presence Will Go With You

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If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways. (13a)

In my words: “God, I need you every day. There is so much confusion and ambiguity, Lord teach me your ways. You and I have an intimate relationship. I have found favor in your sight, but please teach me how to know your ways and lead these people.”

Let me tell you that this is an excellent way to start the year.

Lord teach me your ways.

Why?

1. Because His ways are not necessarily my ways. His ways are the best, and the right ones... I want to ask Him daily: “Lord, teach me your ways...”

2. Teach us collectively as the church body to know your ways. The church is the community of the believers. We are the body of the Christ, and Christ is our head.

Lord teach us your ways daily...

It is daily commitment...

• Then God says:

My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (14)

God gives Moses the most comforting promise for the future – the promise of presence and guidance.

In Hebrew, the word “presence” literally is “face” (My face will go with you).

Moses’ response: He wants assurance and certainty:

If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us from here (15).

The word if, unless is used.

Moses wants assurance that without the presence of the Lord, he and his people are not willing go anywhere...

3. Are you ready to be led by God?

Unfortunately, the Israelites were not so eager to **know the ways of the Lord**. They just wanted to see the **acts of the Lord**. They just wanted to see the **mighty miracles of the Lord**.

We find this in the Gospel of John too. People wanted signs from Jesus. And Jesus was interested to see beyond the sign.

What are the real meanings of those signs?

What were they indicating?

Unfortunately, many of us are not very much interested in the ways of the Lord. Why? It is tough to walk in His ways. It could be not the way you wanted to go. Yet, many are interested in the “deeds”, miracles, and acts of the Lord. There is nothing wrong in knowing the deeds of the Lord. But it is like eating the cake without baking it. Study the life of the Israelites in the OT. They always wanted some signs. God gave them signs and performed miracles. Yet, they were always complaining. But look at Moses; he was so close to God, God even called him “friend” (as a man speaks with his friend) (vs. 11). God promised him saying:

My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest (14)

I read the OT with new glasses; we live post-resurrection. Jesus did the same thing. He came to lead us; he became our shepherd, the Good Shepherd who leads, finds pastures, finds us a place for rest, and protects us.

Today we also celebrate Armenian Christmas.

What are you looking for in 2020?

Are you interested in His ways, or you just simply want to see His “deeds”?

How certain does 2021 look?

What guarantees do we have in 2021?

Well, just think about our year that passed. We usually print our monthly calendar in our church publication *Pilgrim’s Progress*. We stopped doing that starting April 2020. Suddenly people couldn’t plan things ahead of time.

In the month of December, I presented to the council the events of year 2021. I put the important dates of banquets, merchant luncheon, DVBS, and more in my annual calendar. Can I even make plans?

All dates of weddings, concerts, business meetings were canceled.

In fact, if you look to the calendar of January 2021 it is empty.

Look to your personal calendar, it is empty, except maybe doctor appointments, if they are extremely important... We live day by day.

Our lives are like that of the Israelites: in uncertainty.

The best way to start the year: ***If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways (13a)***

Moses had an intimate relationship with God.

And the Lord said to Moses, ***I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name. (Exodus 33:17 NIV 11)***

I want to have that kind of a relationship with God.

King David wrote in his Psalm 16

⁹Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure,

¹⁰because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay.

¹¹You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. (Psalm 16:9-11 NIV11)

There is joy in the presence of God

Eternal pleasure.

We all waited for 2020 to end. I get it. Yet 2021 is the same as 2020, there is nothing new under the sun.

I wish a better year. I wish no war in Armenia. I wish end of pandemic.

Yet, my hope is in the Lord. When we live under the guidance of God every day there is something new our lives. Every day is a new day....

I quoted this last year and I will do it again:

“Towards the unknown future in the hands the all-knowing God.”

Amen

MODERATOR'S REPORT

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart,
as working for the Lord,
not for human masters... (Colossians 3:23 NIV)*

When we go outside and look around us, we feel the wintery weather, wind, snow, rain and the frigid cold. Yet our hearts are filled with the warmth of God's unconditional love. He loves us so much that He sent His only son as redemption for our sins.

The year 2020 has been a difficult and challenging one. Looking back over the many months of the pandemic experience, we see the evidence of God's grace and faithfulness to our church during this time. As we embark on 2021 it is my prayer that our labor will be fruitful for the advancement of His kingdom.

December Council Report

The Council's plan was not to meet in December, yet an emergency meeting was needed to address the California Governor's "Stay at Home order" with regard to holding the worship service in the sanctuary. After a lengthy and healthy discussion, the following was decided:

- To continue with live, outdoor worship services, as weather permits; and live stream the worship services as well.
- If outdoor worship services are unable to occur, due to bad weather, the worship services will be live streamed only.
- To continue outdoor/indoor Sunday School classes while abiding by all current health protocols. There are approximately 10 students in attendance in three classes, thus easily allowing social distancing and other protocols.
- To continue outdoor/indoor youth group activities, based on weather conditions.
- The Christmas Eve Worship Service will be virtual, with a variety of musical selections and singing. Discussion regarding the possibility of a small outdoor candlelight service also took place.
- Christmas caroling for home-bound individuals would be scheduled. Calls would be made to the individuals asking if caroling would be appreciated. It was suggested that families caravan to each home in their own vehicles. One person from the group would approach the residence and knock on the door, and all carolers would social distance away from the door, sing and return to their vehicles to move on to the next home.

As we embark on a new year, we remain thankful to God for His continued love and protection, and for His guidance as we serve Him through the church.

I wish you all a **very Happy New Year** and a **Merry Armenian Christmas** It is my earnest prayer that you remain safe and in good health throughout 2021.

– by Moderator Edward Saliba

*"As it is, there are many parts, but one body."
(1 Corinthians 12:20 NIV)*

YOUTH MINISTRY CAROLING

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24–25 NIV11)

If one were to ask a pastor what the most difficult commands are to follow during this covid crisis, and the lock downs, my guess is that the above passage from Hebrews would be in the top 10, quite possibly the top 5. And I'd argue that this burden is experienced more acutely by those of us who engage and minister to young people.

Most everything student ministry seeks to accomplish is done within the context of being together – every ounce of spurring that is meant to take place, tends to be done when we are WITH one another.

So, while almost every event for the year got postponed (eternally postponed?) it was a delight to not "postpone" Christmas caroling. Something that allowed us to be with each other, sing and encourage others, with the prayer that this would be an act of love, that reminds all of us that Christ has come, and that Christ will come again, for the Day is approaching. Love, grace and mercy.

– Rev. Kevin Kasper

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WITH SYMPATHY:

WE ARE DEEPLY SADDENED BY THE PASSING OF:

Harry Sadoian – December 9

Ruth Hanks – December 20 (Vicky Kizirian's mother)

Our condolences to all the families

Well done, good and faithful servant.

You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much.

Enter into the joy of your master. (Matthew 25:21)

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To My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

My heart is filled with deep appreciation and gratitude to all of you who have expressed so much care and concern through your prayers, beautiful cards of condolence, and phone calls for the passing of my dear mother, Arousiag Missirlian, as well as your generous donations.

The volume of these responses that have reached me during this time has been tremendous and overwhelming, making it difficult to respond personally to each one of you. So it is with deep sincerity that my family and I extend my thanks to all of you in this manner.

Joe and I are blessed to be a part of the family of believers at Pilgrim Armenian Church. May God richly bless each one of you and keep you under his loving care.

– Love in Christ, Doreen and Joe Fischer



PILGRIM *Armenian* CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

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SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP

Outdoors In-person 10:30 am
Masks Mandatory • Social distancing

Online at 10:30 am

On our website: pilgrimchurch.com

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Children's Ministry Update

Dear Pilgrim Family,

We've had a festive and fun time continuing to "grow together in Christ" during the month of December. Our creative theme was Christmas Trees. The children produced artwork by creating Christmas Trees using different types of media that have been featured in the windows of the Christian Education building for all to enjoy.

On Christmas Sunday, we changed things up and celebrated the greatest Gift ever! Our devotional included John 3:16 and Ephesians 2:8.

A fun time was had by all!

The Children's Ministry Team wishes to thank the families along with so many others who have supported us this year. Above all, we give thanks to God for making this ministry possible.

We look forward to the new year and all that is to come! On January 10th, we will resume the inductive Bible Study of John. Please consider having your children or family members join us if they haven't already. New friends are always welcome.

Classes we currently offer:

- 4/5 Year Old Class
- 1-3 Grade Class
- 4-6 Grade Class

Check in: 9-9:15a • Class time: 9:15-10:15a

– Melinda Ertzian, Director of Children's Ministries

