

Pastor Jon's Sermon from June 14, 2020

Text: Exodus 19:2-8a.

### **God Keeps God's Promises Despite Our Flaws**

In our lessons for today, I'm comforted by the fact that God has a history of partnering with flawed humans to accomplish God's purposes in the world. And the good news is, no matter how badly we humans mess this partnership up, God remains faithful to God's people... always keeping God's promises. Still today God calls us, the church, as flawed we are, to be part of the solution as we navigate things like a global pandemic and a renewed consciousness about racial inequality in our country. We are part of the solution. We are an essential voice in the healing of the world.

It starts with listening. In our first lesson, God listened to the people's cries for justice. In Exodus 19, God follows through on God's promise to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3:7-8 when the Lord said to Moses, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters, Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, flowing with milk and honey." God heard the cries of the people, saw the injustice, and God acted, bringing the Israelites from slavery into freedom. God imagined a better future for the Israelites. It is no wonder our black brothers and sisters have claimed this story as their very own. Inspired black preaching and spirituals have risen out of the Exodus story.

We know from the Exodus story that Moses was one of those flawed characters I am talking about. We recall how Moses was taken in as a baby by Pharaoh's daughter in a basket floating down the river. When Moses grew up with Egyptian "privilege", he saw his people's forced labor, and watched an Egyptian beat a Hebrew, one his kinsfolk. This angered Moses. And in an act that should not be glorified, Moses took revenge and killed the Egyptian that killed his kin. Moses was deemed a murderer. Moses fled to Midian because Pharaoh wanted Moses dead. One day in Midian, when Moses was out tending the flock of his Father-in-law, God called him out of a

burning bush to go back to Egypt to lead his people out of slavery. Moses said, not me Lord, send someone else. But he went anyway.

Fast forward to Exodus 19 after the Israelites left Egypt and were in the wilderness, they camped at the base of Mount Sinai. Moses shuttled up and down the mountain 4 times to get instructions from God on how they were to live as a community when they entered the promised land. God is making a covenant with the Israelites. God will hold up God's end of the bargain if the Israelites do their part. This is where Moses received the 10 commandments... the law.

So in our first lesson, God says to Moses, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant you shall be my treasured possession out of all peoples. You shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation."

God is promising to set the Israelites apart to be a people that are treasured and will teach the world about God's ways. God will use their collective history and pain as well as their freedom as an occasion to minister to others. Moses shared with the people everything God commanded and the people emphatically said, "Everything that the Lord has spoken, we will do."

Yeah right. The Israelites continuously broke God's commandments. We still break God's commandments today and every day.

Thank God for the promises of the new Testament, where God made a new covenant with all people... Jews and Gentiles alike. Our second Lesson from Romans 5 says God proves God's love for us by sending Jesus into the world while we were still sinners. God didn't wait for us to get it right. God made us right... justified us by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. God's love for us does not depend on how well we perform in life or how good we are. Jesus took our failures to the cross. His blood is the new covenant. We remember this in our communion liturgy where we say this is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins.

So life as a Christian begs the question, "How do we live with this new found freedom?"

Our Psalm, Psalm 100, reminds us to live lives with thanksgiving and praise in our hearts. We are God's people, the sheep of God's pasture.

Finally, in our Gospel, Jesus, God in human flesh, continues to call and send out flawed humans to continue God's mission of healing proclaiming God's kingdom come. Like God saw the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt, when Jesus saw the crowds that were following him, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus had compassion for the crowds. That means Jesus had compassion for all, because that is who was in the crowds. People of all walks of life. So, Jesus sent his disciples out as missionaries into the world to cast out demons, cure every disease and sickness. Concern for souls is accompanied by genuine concern for bodily existence.

Jesus wants them to travel light so they learn to rely on the hospitality of others. And he warns them, they will face resistance, sometimes arrest, or flogging.

The bottom line is, being a Christian, following Jesus, will keep you up at night. Compassion for others will hurt your heart at times. And yet we are called listen, see, and feel the pain of those who are harassed and helpless. We are called to in the Sermon on the Mount to do unto others as we would have them do unto us and to use our privilege to speak for others who do not have a voice.