



Mount Olive Devotion

The 24th Week after Pentecost (November 9– 13, 2020)

Monday

Exodus 13: 3-10

³ Moses said to the people, “Remember this day on which you came out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, because the LORD brought you out from there by strength of hand; no leavened bread shall be eaten. ⁴ Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out. ⁵ When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your ancestors to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this observance in this month. ⁶ Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival to the LORD. ⁷ Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen in your possession, and no leaven shall be seen among you in all your territory. ⁸ You shall tell your child on that day, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.’ ⁹ It shall serve for you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead, so that the teaching of the LORD may be on your lips; for with a strong hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt. ¹⁰ You shall keep this ordinance at its proper time from year to year.

This passage is early in the Exodus narrative as the people of Israel begin their wilderness wanderings. This is even before the deliverance at the Red Sea. Already, the Israelites are establishing practices which will remind them in the days to come of the faithfulness of God, how “with a strong hand the Lord brought [them] out of Egypt.” People of faith have often followed this model. We have patterns of worship, practices of prayer, spiritual rhythms and disciplines of all kinds that ground us in God’s love and faithfulness. These regular patterns and practices are so important, especially when life is difficult and days are long. Daily reading of God’s word connects us again and again to words of promise and life. Regular prayers allow us a space to connect with God and to offer our praises and our requests to God. Meditation, fasting, worship, service, and simple quiet listening for God’s voice, can quiet our anxious hearts and bring us in touch with our Faithful God.

Prayer

Quiet our anxious hearts, O God. Give us your “peace which passes understanding” so that in all times and places we might have faith and joy. We are your children. We are those you have called beloved, forgiven, and heirs of eternity. Remind us of this every day, and help us to be agents of your love to others. In Jesus’ name, we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Exodus 14:10-14

¹⁰ As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." ¹³ But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still."

We all remember the story of the deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea. Perhaps we are even old enough to remember the Hollywood version of this dramatic rescue, with Charlton Heston's hair blowing in the wind as he watches the demise of the Egyptian army. What we may forget is this scene *before* the rescue. The people are so panicked that they claim that it would have been better to have remained slaves in Egypt! This is understandable given the fact that a body of water stands in front of them and an approaching army stands behind them. This is a feeling we too might be able to relate to. Perhaps we are facing a daunting challenge: a life-threatening medical diagnosis, a collapsing marriage, an intolerable work environment, or loved ones who are trapped in the nightmare of untreated addictions or mental illness. We may wonder what we should do. Should we step foot into the future, trusting in God's faithfulness, or should we let ourselves be controlled by fear? Perhaps Moses shows us a way here. He says, "Do not be afraid, stand firm... the Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still." We may be afraid, but with God's promise of faithfulness, we can step forward, confident in God's unfailing power.

Prayer

When we are afraid, O God, let us not be controlled by that fear. When we are worried about everything that threatens us, let us not be consumed by that worry. Rather, O God, grant that we might be controlled by faith in you, despite our fears. Grant that your Holy Spirit might fill our hearts and minds, so that, come what may, we might be found at rest in you. In Christ's name, we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

Exodus 16:4-8

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. ⁵ On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.” ⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?” ⁸ And Moses said, “When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD.”

The Israelites are now in the midst of their second month since departing from Egypt. The deliverance at the Red Sea, even in all of its spectacular drama, is now well behind them, and their provisions are running low. They are in the desert. Food and water are scarce and days are long. We can understand their grumblings. Perhaps they thought that by this time, they would have reached the Promised Land and they are beginning to think they have somehow been duped by God. Oh how well, we know this feeling. We have lived through heady days when God’s power and presence seemed so real, but then there comes this “wilderness time.” Wilderness times are times when God seems absent or at the very least, no longer taking much interest in us. We cry out, “Don’t you care about us, God?” And still God is silent. This story reminds us that even in these times, God has not abandoned us, but promises to provide. Perhaps God’s provision will come in an unexpected way like it did for the Israelites who received manna and quail in the desert, but we can be assured that it will come. God is faithful. We will need to trust this, even in those days when our faith is tested.

Prayer

We know our faith is fragile, O God. We know that just a few bad days, even one rather important disappointment, can cause us to doubt your care for us. Forgive us, Lord. We are like the man who cried out to Jesus, “I believe. Help my unbelief!” Fill us with your Holy Spirit, Gracious Father, that we, like trusting children, might place all our faith in you. Grant this through Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Thursday

Exodus 19:1-8a

On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. ²They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. ³Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: ⁴You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, ⁶but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites." ⁷So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸The people all answered as one: "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do."

The Israelites have been journeying in the wilderness for several months now, and they have come to the foot of Mount Sinai, the place where they will be consecrated and formed as a people. The giving of the Ten Commandments will be done here, as well as the giving of many other commandments regarding their life together. Notice also the presence of the word 'covenant'. A covenant is an agreement between God and the people, with both sides agreeing to the terms. You can see the terms: "If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples." What a daunting covenant that must have been! Yet, we too, live in a covenant we made with God. At our baptism, we, or more likely our parents, were asked if we would commit ourselves to "grow in the Christian faith and life." That's our part. As to God's part, we heard God say, "Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the Cross of Christ forever." That is no small promise. Out of all the people in the world, God said to you, "You are marked forever!" That means God will never let you go, no matter what happens.

Prayer

How we praise you, Gracious God, for calling us your own in Holy Baptism and leading us in "the way of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever." Grant that every day we might live fully into this promise, taking joy in the covenant you have made with us. In Christ's name, we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: ³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. ⁸ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹ “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Scholars have noted that in Matthew’s gospel Jesus is sometimes pictured as another Moses. Evidence for that is the setting for the Sermon on the Mount where, in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus has gone “up the mountain” in order to teach. You will recall that Moses went up onto Mount Sinai when he was to receive the commandments from God. Here the commandments of Moses have been transformed into promises of blessing, and how dear these promises are to us. If we are poor in spirit, mourning, meek, or hungering for justice, we are blessed. If we are people of mercy, purity, and peacemaking, and persecuted for our good works, we are blessed. Even if people revile us and utter “all kinds of evil against [us] falsely” on account of our relationship with Christ, we are blessed. Blessed means to be favored by God. It means to be assured that God will not forget us or abandon us. Like the people of Israel who stood before Mount Sinai and received their covenant with God, we stand before Mount Calvary and receive our covenant with God. We are forgiven, freed, and filled with the Spirit of God. We are blessed, and nothing will ever change that.

Prayer

Thank you, Almighty and Gracious God, for calling us blessed. Thank you for assuring us of our place with you, even when we are poor in spirit, broken with grief, or struggling in our quest for justice and peace. Help us to be people of mercy and peace, giving to others the grace you have extended to us. In Christ’s name, we pray. AMEN.