

Exodus 19:2-8a

The Israelites had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. Then 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: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ 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 the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.”

So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. The people all answered as one: “Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.”

When we look at our passage from Exodus this morning, we see that the Israelites have come a long way into and out of captivity. If they were to look back in their rear-view mirror they have seen a story of both reception when Joseph was a high ranking official and of brutal domination under Pharaoh. They would have remembered how they arrived in Egypt as welcomed guests, and lived like that for generations. But, also how when a new Pharaoh came to power, they ended up as slaves. As a result of that, they cried out to God for help, and not just during a Saturday revival meeting. It was long and continual and God heard and acted. Moses was born a Jew, and raised Egyptian royalty, and fled a wanted criminal. So far not the greatest part of the story.

However, when the time was right, God sent Moses back to Egypt, prepared for a mission, to lead the Israelites out. Moses requested freedom from Pharaoh, Pharaoh refused, and plagues were brought. With the last plague, the death of the first born, on what has come to be remembered and celebrated as Passover, Pharaoh relented and let them leave.

And their preparation continued. As if all that so far would not have been enough for the Israelites to faithfully follow God, along their way on their journey home God brought pillars of smoke and fire to guide and protect them, he gave them water from a stone, manna from heaven, and quail as a feast. When they were cornered with their backs to the Red Sea and Pharaoh’s army bearing down on them, he gave them passage through the water and brought an end to the army when the water returned to its normal state. One thing after another, one example after another, where God showed himself in order to move his plan forward.

And in this morning's passage, camping at the base of Mt. Sinai, they were brought to a decision point. It wasn't their first and it certainly wouldn't be their last, but it was an important one. They were there, now free from out of Egypt, at the base of a mountain, intended to play an important role in God's ongoing plan of salvation, but they would not be forced. They needed to recognize and accept for themselves who they were and who they were meant to be.

So, God invites Moses up the mountain for the first time. He had a message for them all. Here's what it was:

"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

And Moses brought the message from God to the people. They were to be part of something huge that God would do for the world, they were to be a priestly kingdom, a holy nation, but they had to decide to accept the mission. It wouldn't be easy, and as we know, they weren't always good at it. And on top of their own actions for their own time, if they accepted the call, they would have to teach future generations what they had experienced and what they chose. Future generations, that would have to listen to their story and renew for themselves the covenant that was being made based on their message. But the first step was that they, at the base of Mt. Sinai, had to accept it. And they did. Their response was a resounding, "Everything that the Lord has spoken, we will do."

Now, fast forward to today. A great deal has been added to our story. The Jewish people followed God faithfully and found joy and abundance. They also, at times, turned away from God and found sorrow, and exile, and division. The prophets spoke the heart of God to the people and gave a future glimpse of the coming Messiah. Jesus came and brought a new clarity to truth, a more powerful experience of healing, and a deeper understanding of love and salvation. The church came to life and we brought the Good News of Christ to the world. And, like our Jewish brothers and sisters, at times, we too faltered in living out God's true mission to all people. We've had a history, a story in our time, of faithfully living the Truth and Love of Christ, but also times of perverting that same Truth and Love for the benefit of human desires.

And today I think that God has the same message for us that he had for the Israelites as they settled in at the base of Mt. Sinai: "You have seen what I have done within your history. Exodus from Egypt and slavery, prosperity in the land of promise, return from an exile of your own doing, my Son sent to live along side of you to show you the face of God, redemption on the cross, new life from the tomb, and a mission to all people. Now, as then, if you keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession, and you will continue to be a priestly people and a holy mission within the world." That is our history and that is our ongoing call.

And I had the chance to see this being lived out this past week. Beginning last Sunday, people from Redeemer have been intentionally living out the mission. Project Host Soup Kitchen, Serenity Place, Acts of Kindness in Downtown Greenville, United Ministries, Samaritan House Food Bank. We brought food and Love to people who were hungry. We brought Joy and Love to children who have had their lives disrupted by the abuse of drugs and alcohol. We handed out water and flowers to the thirsty downtown and were given a glimpse into the struggle of homelessness under a bridge. And we packed bags and handed out food to those in need and fed volunteers who gave of themselves to bring God's Love.

It was a good week. It was a really good week. It was a good week, not just because we did good work. It was a good week because we did good work for, and with, God. We acted as a kingdom of priests within a holy mission. We responded this week to God's invitation with a resounding, "Everything that the Lord has spoken, we will do!"

And as we go forward, it is imperative, and God's expectation, that we bring to the next generation the opportunity to be part of the same amazing and life-giving mission that we have made a covenant with God to be a part of. As our mission statement says, "We are drawing near to God to make and equipped disciples and to live as faithful followers of Christ."

The ongoing work of God is on our shoulders. It is not an option. It is an imperative for our time.

Amen