

Jim Gill

Rally Day
"Midst"

September 10, 2017

Exodus 12:1-14 Matthew 18:15-20 Romans 13:9-14

INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS 12:1-14

In our journey through the Old Testament we now come to the part that describes the origin of the Passover. Moses, who was raised in the Pharaoh's court and forced to flee for killing an Egyptian, has returned and has challenged Pharaoh time and again through nine different devastating plagues to let his people go. Time and again Pharaoh has refused. Pharaoh tried to have Moses killed as a baby, but now Moses brings on this last plague which results in the death of the first born of all Egypt, both human and animal. Hear the Word from Exodus 12:1-14.

INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW 18:15-20.

This morning's gospel lesson Jesus shares the promise that wherever two or three come together in his name, he is in their midst. But you don't get to that verse without verses 15-19. These verses give directions and instructions as to what to do when two or three have been split apart. Paul gives steps to walk through so that ...when conflicts arise, rather than be split apart, two or three people can be gathered together in Jesus' name and experience his presence in their midst. Hear the word of God, the gospel of our Lord from Matthew 18:15-20

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we know that wherever people come together there are conflicts. Jesus was crucified because even he had people at odds with him. Help us to know how and to be committed to work through the conflicts and disagreements that arise so that as followers of Jesus we can come together to accomplish far more than anything we can do on our own. As we meditate on your Word this morning, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight our Rock and Our Redeemer.

Norman Vincent Peal once said, "The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism."

One of the things I like best about the New Testament is that it is so practical. It must have been the fact that Jesus had human beings like you and me always with him that forced him to speak in such everyday terms about everyday problems. Sometimes Christians disagree in the congregation of believers. Sometimes they quarrel. Sometimes they hold grudges against each other. The church is not exempt from conflict. We may be exempt from taxes (so far), but there is no conflict exemption form.

Conflicts exist. Conflict exist in business. Conflicts exist in families, and in schools, and in City Councils, certainly between governments, and also IN governments, between races and nations....Conflicts even exist in kindergartens.

God. The hymns, the prayers, the reading from the Word, the participation in the sacrament of baptism and Holy Communion are designed to bring us together, to bind us together in love.

Of course, you can read the Word, and sing the hymns and pray eloquent prayers and listen to a television preacher at home. The critical difference is that when you come to church you are doing these things in the company of other believers. It's hard to have a midst between yourself and a screen. And, as we have seen these past two weeks, a screen can't come and help you rip carpet.

Paul wrote that we are to "love our neighbor as ourselves. Love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Paul wrote that we are the body of Christ. And when one member suffers we all suffer. What or who do we have in common? We have the same needs for shelter and food and water. We have the same needs for companionship and friendship. We have the same need to be loved and to love in return. We have the same need for dignity and purpose. But most importantly, we have the same savior, Jesus, the one who is in our midst, who tells us what to do when we are separated, whether by conflict or by floods.... so that we can come together. We have in common a Savior who IS the tie that binds. .

In verses 19-20 Jesus shifts to talk about what it can be like when what separates us is dealt with and people are not split apart but can come together in his name.

Jesus promises that if two believers agree in prayer about anything, it will be granted. Now this is hard for me because sometimes I have found someone to agree with me in prayer for something and it was not granted. That's why Jesus puts a qualifier in his statement. The qualifier is, "in my name."

Prayers are not always answered with a yes. Sometimes they are answered with a not yet, sometimes they are answered with a no.

We don't know all the reasons why storms come. We don't know why prayers for the storms to not come were not answered with a yes. Over our lives however, and especially these last two weeks, we have seen answers to prayer in dealing with the aftermath of storms.

In his book Restoration: Confronting the Brother, Bob Tasler writes"

'When you and I come to the end of our days, just remember this: God won't ask what kind of car we drove, but He will ask how many people we helped get where they needed to go. He won't ask how big our house was, but He will ask how many people we welcomed into our home. God won't ask what neighborhood we lived in, but He will ask how we treated our neighbors. And He won't ask how many fences we made, but He will ask how many bridges we built.'

Almighty God, you see your children growing up in an uncertain and confusing world. Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as an opportunity for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you and to keep alive their joy in your creation.

Almighty God, we come to you today and give thanks for all our teachers. Thank you for the way in which they give of themselves each day in the classroom, serving and instructing the next generation of this land. We thank you for them. We pray for school administrators and support staff that all they do will enhance the education of our children youth and students. We especially give thanks for the meals that the schools will be providing in this dire time of need.

We pray for the families of Gertrude Marsh, who served many years as a teacher and for the family of Bobbie Norris who so loved the beauty of the earth. Bless their loved ones as they grieve their loss. And the people said, "Amen."

1. **Restoration: Confronting the Brother, by Bob Tasler**