

Our first lesson today comes from fairly early in the Exodus. The people are at the very beginning of the transition from being a band of runaway slaves to becoming a people and a nation. It may not have been exactly three months, and a few things have happened: water from the rock, the complaints about the food and the giving of the quail and the manna have happened.

The people have camped at the base of the mountain where Moses encountered the LORD in the burning bush. Moses goes up on the mountain and speaks with the LORD. God tells Moses, "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." Moses reported what the LORD had told him and the people all answered as one: "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do."

These must have been very exciting times for the people. They had escaped from slavery; they had seen their pursuers foiled by a miracle at the red sea; they had been given food and drink as needed; they had come into this new place. I'm sure their hopes were very high and they were not thinking of the challenges of passing through the desert and winning a homeland. "If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples." It was easy to agree. It would have been hard to even think of how hard that might be. "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do." This is easier to say than to do.

Today we are in the middle of a great pandemic, struggling to figure out what is safe to do and what is necessary to do anyway. If that weren't enough we also find ourselves confronted by a grim reminder of the systemic racism in our national makeup and the demonstrations of many calling for change. I am sure some of us are saying, "Yes, it is time for real change," and we mean it now but after a while maybe little or nothing will happen. I am also sure some of us are saying, "If I just shelter in place and stop watching the tv news I might feel better." "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do." Or will we?

When Jesus sent his disciples out on their missionary journey he sent them with nothing and told them to accept the hospitality they were given. He told them not to take anything with them to take care of themselves, no gold or silver or copper, but to receive what was given. We don't know what the disciples experienced. I suspect in some places they got bread and water and no more, and in others they were well fed and maybe even overfed.

The important thing is that Jesus told his disciples, "Proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." He didn't tell them to be safe. He didn't tell them to fix society. He told them, "Proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'"

What does it mean for the kingdom of heaven to have come near? What is the good news that we ought to proclaim? Paul writes, "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand." The good news is about peace with God. It is about grace. The Christian faith isn't one more thing we need to do. It isn't about learning the Liturgy or singing hymns. It isn't even about doing good works. We do all those things because we are at peace with God through the grace in which we stand. We are Christians because Christ was willing to die for us. We are Christians because we are loved in spite of all our selfishness and pettiness, and failure to follow through.

The problem is that a lot of the people we know just don't realize this is the good news they need. They don't recognize the fact that they have a huge God shaped hole in their lives. They don't know they are not at peace with God. They don't know they need God's love.

We can't convince others that they need God. We can't convince others that Christ is the answer. What we can do is go out of our way to make them welcome in our lives and in our Church. We need to invite our friends and neighbors to things in the Church we think they might enjoy. When we again have concerts, dinners, speakers, Christmas pageants and other events going on we can invite them. When they have been to a couple of events and discovered that we are pretty normal people they might even be open to trying a worship service.

The people who were camped at the mountain heard what Moses told them, and they answered, "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do." We know they didn't do it very well. The truth is we don't do it very well either, but God loves us anyway. It may be that the death of George Floyd may result in less racism in our land and it may not, but God loves us anyway and black lives have always mattered to God.

The Lord Jesus sent out his disciples without gold, silver, copper, a bag, a tunic, a staff or extra sandals. The same Lord Jesus calls us to reach out to the world around us. We know we should be doing this. "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do." Of course we will because God loves us.

In Jesus' Name. **Amen.**

Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Preface of the Lord's Day

Genesis 18:1-15, (21:1-7)

Psalm 116:1, 10-17

or

Exodus 19:2-8a

Psalm 100

Romans 5:1-8

Matthew 9:35-10:8(9-23)

(Genesis 18:1-15)

¹The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ²He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. ³He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." ⁶And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." ⁷Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate. ⁹They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." ¹⁰Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. ¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹²So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" ¹³The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' ¹⁴Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." ¹⁵But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."

(Genesis 21:1-7)

¹The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised.

²Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. ³Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. ⁴And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. ⁵Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶Now Sarah said, "God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." ⁷And she said, "Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

Psalm 116:1, 10-17

- 1 I love the LORD, because he has heard the voice of my supplication, * because he has inclined his ear to me whenever I called upon him.
- 10 How shall I repay the LORD * for all the good things he has done for me?
- 11 I will lift up the cup of salvation * and call upon the Name of the LORD.
- 12 I will fulfill my vows to the LORD * in the presence of all his people.
- 13 Precious in the sight of the LORD * is the death of his servants.
- 14 O LORD, I am your servant; * I am your servant and the child of your handmaid; you have freed me from my bonds.
- 15 I will offer you the sacrifice of thanksgiving * and call upon the Name of the LORD.
- 16 I will fulfill my vows to the LORD * in the presence of all his people,
- 17 In the courts of the LORD'S house, * in the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Hallelujah!

(Exodus 19:2-8a)

They 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."

Psalms 100 Jubilate Deo

- 1 Be joyful in the Lord, all you lands; * serve the Lord with gladness and come before his presence with a song.
- 2 Know this: The Lord himself is God; * he himself has made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.
- 3 Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise; * give thanks to him and call upon his Name.
- 4 For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; * and his faithfulness endures from age to age.

(Romans 5:1-8)

¹Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. ⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

(Matthew 9:35-38)

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep

without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

(Matthew 10:1-8)

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. *(Matthew 10:9-23) Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.* ¹⁶"See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; ¹⁸and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; ²⁰for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ²¹Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; ²²and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ²³When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.