

**Sermon for Morning Prayer
The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity**

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the second Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, Called Exodus.ⁱⁱ

“And there went a man of the house of Levi [**LEE-vie**], and took to wife a daughter of Levi [**LEE-vie**]. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river’s brink. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.

“And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river’s side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews’ children. Then said his sister to Pharaoh’s daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child’s mother. And Pharaoh’s daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

“And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill

me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian [**MIDD-ee-ann**]: and he sat down by a well. Now the priest of Midian [**MIDD-ee-ann**] had seven daughters: and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. And the shepherds came and drove them away: but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock. And when they came to Reuel [**ROO-ell**] their father, he said, How is it that ye are come so soon today? And they said, An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and also drew water enough for us, and watered the flock. And he said unto his daughters, And where is he? why is it that ye have left the man? call him, that he may eat bread. And Moses was content to dwell with the man: and he gave Moses Zipporah [**ZIPP-or-uh**] his daughter. And she bare him a son, and he called his name Gershom [**GURR-shomm**]: for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land."

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the General Epistle of James.ⁱⁱⁱ

"From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother,

speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another? Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

Back in 1989, Stanley Hauerwas, Professor of Ethics at Duke Divinity School, collaborated with William Willimon, the university chaplain, to produce a book entitled “Resident Aliens” – subtitled “Life in the Christian Colony”.

The thesis of the book is that the culture of the church is very different from the prevailing culture of America and that we have to learn how to live as “strangers and pilgrims”, to use a biblical phrase, in a foreign country. Our true home is in heaven. We are citizens, or perhaps I should say subjects, of The Kingdom of God. We are here to establish a colony of that kingdom in the midst of a world dominated by an alien culture.

Moses found himself in such a situation in the Old Testament lesson for today. As the adopted grandson of the Pharaoh, he was not enslaved like his fellow Jews. He led a privileged life in the most prosperous country in the world at that time, but he was not captivated by that lifestyle. He was educated in the advanced lore and knowledge of Egypt but his mother, who was his nursemaid, saw to it that he never forgot he was a Hebrew.

Day after day Moses observed the suffering of his people, and he identified with them. When he saw an Egyptian beating a fellow Hebrew, Moses killed the Egyptian on the spot.

Was Moses wrong in killing the Egyptian? Some would say yes. One of the Ten Commandments is “Thou shalt do no murder.” But that is because God reserves for Himself the right to decide who should live and who should die.

The murderer takes that decision upon himself and kills for his own convenience or to achieve his own selfish desires. God pronounces the death penalty on those who do that as well as on others who advance their own position in this world at the expense of others who are less powerful than they.

God is not a pacifist. It is we who seem to think that death is the ultimate evil. But there are many things that are far more evil in the eyes of God than death.

God did not mind killing all the firstborn sons of Egyptian families as part of his campaign to force the pharaoh to release the Jews from slavery. He did not mind killing the Egyptian soldiers who were sent to pursue the Jews when they crossed the Red Sea.

I would argue that the killing of the Egyptian who abused his Hebrew slave was the first sign that God intended to liberate His people from their bondage, and Moses was to be his agent in that liberation. There is always a price to be paid for playing that role and the price Moses paid was to forfeit his privileged position and become a fugitive.

The second person of The Holy Trinity paid a similar but much more costly price to liberate us from our bondage to sin and death. He “emptied himself”, as St. Paul said, of His divine glory and immortality to become a mortal man. And not a wealthy influential man, but a lowly despised man who suffered a horrifying and premature death.

Like Moses, our Lord identified Himself with the poor and the oppressed, the aliens and the outcasts rather than with the wealthy and

the privileged. And like Moses He did this voluntarily and paid a price for it.

Like Moses, He was a man of passion who became very angry when He saw powerful people preying upon those who could not defend themselves. His anger was expressed physically on only one occasion, but His words of condemnation are more fatal than any sword thrust. Listen to these words from St. Luke's version of The Sermon on the Mount:

“Woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger. Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, so their fathers did to the false prophets.”

These words are fatal because they represent the judgment of the God who holds the power of life and death over the souls as well as over the bodies of men.

So Moses not only prefigures the Exodus, he prefigures the incarnation as well.

Hauerwas and Willimon are right. The culture of the Kingdom of God is different from the culture of America or of any other nation on earth. The values are different. The laws are different. The ways thinking and the ways of achieving things are different. We are a different people, or at least we are called be a different people. But, like Moses, we have a choice to make.

We can curry the favor of the world we are living in, adapt our ways to its ways, and enjoy all the privileges and honors this world can bestow. Or we can claim our heritage as people whose homeland is in another world, live by the laws and the values of that world, identify with the victims of the world we live in, and pay the price for doing it. Moses chose the latter. Jesus chose the latter. How do you choose?

--oo0oo--

Charlottesville, Virginia
September 12, 2010

ⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

ⁱⁱ *Exodus 2: 1-22 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *James 4: 1-17 (KJV).*