

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest-in-Charge

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the nineteenth Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, called Exodus.²

“In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. For they were departed from Rephidim [**REFF-ih-dimm**], and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount. And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

“And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him.

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“And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice

of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice. ...

“And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the third Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Romans.³

“What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God. ... Now we know that what things soever the law saith [**SETH**], it saith [**SETH**] to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.”

bring other people into their community, but they resist the false ideologies of Gnosticism and New Age spirituality that run through our culture, carrying men and women to their doom. They remain anchored in the God who called them out of Egypt to be His own peculiar people.

We don't need to observe their dietary laws or their rituals, but we do need to be counter-cultural in our own way. We need to follow our own calendar, especially as Christmas approaches. We need to use our resources to advance the priorities that God has laid out for us in Scripture. We need to live by the values and beliefs we have learned from the Holy Apostles. It is God's approval that we seek and not the approval of public opinion.

We need to live as a new Israel, because that's what we are: a kingdom of priests speaking to God in behalf of the world and speaking to the world in behalf of God. We are the chosen ones. And we are the hope of a dying world.

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St. David's Anglican Catholic Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

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¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxvi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² Exodus 19:1-7, 16-19, & 20:1-3 (KJV).

³ Romans 3:1-2, 19-31 (KJV).

⁴ Exodus 19:3b-6a (RSV).

⁵ St. Matthew 28:19-20a (RSV).

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: “[T]ell the people of Israel: 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 will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests....”⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

In this text, God is telling the people of Israel who they are and why He has led them out of Egypt and into the desert. He is giving them an identity and a mission. He is calling them to become a nation set apart, different from all other nations. They are to be intermediaries, speaking to God in behalf of the world and speaking to the world in behalf of God. They are to be an instrument in the hands of God for rescuing the world from the results of Adam's disobedience.

The reason they are to be set apart as a priestly nation is so that they may serve the rest of the world. Let me show you what I mean by painting a picture.

There is a great rock standing in the midst of a raging flood. People are being swept along by the powerful current to a tragic end. There is a man standing on the rock with a tree branch in his hand. He is reaching out to the people being swept by to try to pull them to safety. But he can only help them if he himself maintains his balance and his firm footing on the rock.

The nations of the world are like those people being swept along by the flood. Ever since Adam and Eve made the

fateful decision to take into their own hands the right to decide for themselves what is good and what is evil, the people of the world have been left with nothing outside of themselves to hold onto. They are being carried to their death by currents of sin that are too strong for them to resist.

God is like that rock standing firm in the midst of the flood. Israel, and the Church that grows out of it, are called to be like that man on the rock reaching out to the world.

But the Church and the holy nation out of which it came have to be careful. If the man on the rock reaches too far and gets caught up in the current himself, he is of no value to anyone. On other hand, if he simply preserves himself and ignores those who are perishing, he is useless to God and unworthy of his priestly calling.

Doctors, lawyers, and psychological counselors are in a similar position. They have to be involved with the lives of their clients, and they have to understand them, but they cannot become so involved that they lose their objectivity and get carried along by the same emotions as are their clients.

So God called His people out of Egypt into the desert in order to separate them from the influence of the sophisticated pagan culture in which they were living. He gave His people values and laws to live by that would set them apart from other people. He gave them rituals that would focus their attention on Him to the exclusion of all other deities. And He gave them leaders who were not afraid to confront the followers of the false deities with which they were surrounded.

But the Jews could not remain aloof from the pagan cultures of their neighbors. They slipped off the rock and failed in their mission. They became just like everybody else: no longer holy, no longer set apart, no longer a peculiar people. They ridiculed and persecuted the prophets that God sent to recall them

to their roots and to their true identity and to their mission in the world. Eventually they were destroyed as a sovereign nation.

But God did not give up. In the fullness of time He sent His only begotten Son to fulfill their role. Jesus held firmly to the rock of ages and gathered a new community, a new chosen people, a new community of priests, salvaged from the remnant of the old.

He called this little band of disciples from their ordinary pursuits to follow Him around and learn from Him. He often took them away from the crowds for instruction and for prayer, just as His Father had called the Jews out of Egypt into the desert. He formed that new community into a new Israel, which we now call "The Church". And, when the Apostles were ready, He gave them the commission that old Israel had failed to carry out: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you..."⁵ And then He promised that, even though His body was going away, His Spirit would remain with them.

You and I are the heirs of that commission and that promise. You and I are called to stand apart from the rest of the world and function as a priestly people, presenting God to the world and presenting the world to God.

We can't do that if we allow ourselves to get caught up in the cultural tides that are carrying so many people to spiritual death. We can't do it if we try so hard to reach out to them that we lose our footing on the rock of ages and join them in their path to destruction.

I admire the Jews who today continue to observe the dietary laws and the rituals that set them apart from other people. They are our allies in our stand against abortion and gay sex and all other sexual activity that takes place outside of the bonds of marriage. They may not try as hard as we do to