

Westminster Presbyterian Church
Vero Beach, Florida 32966
Rev. Dr. Les Koerselman
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Psalm 29
Isaiah 43:1-7
Exodus 32:1-6

‘When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron, and said to him, “Up, make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” And Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” So, all the people took off the rings of gold, which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made a molten calf; and they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.” And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.’

“The Weakness of Man”

Dear Friends in Christ, the subject of our meditation today is from the Book of Exodus 32:6, “And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.”

When God calls a man or a woman, they are summoned to a new life. This life is always a life of adventure. Such was the case with Moses. He was saved from annihilation as an infant and later reared and educated in Pharaoh’s court. At the age of forty he encountered an Egyptian who is fighting with a Hebrew. He settled the dispute by killing the Egyptian and burying his body in the sand. On the morrow two Israelites are arguing and Moses seeks to intercede. He is confronted with the caustic words, “if we do not stop fighting will our fate be the same as the Egyptian of yesterday?” Moses realizes that other eyes have been watching and he now fears for his life.

Moses flees Egypt and enters the land of Midian. Raised in a royal court with all its privileges, Moses now finds that he will tend sheep for the next forty years. But all the while God has been preparing Moses. He gave to Moses forty years of the finest education in Egypt and forty years of tending sheep. Both proved to be invaluable in leading the people of Israel out of their slavery.

At eighty years of age he was confronted with a burning bush that was not consumed. He took off his shoes realizing that this was a holy place and God began to speak to him out of the burning bush. He called Moses to a new life, a life of leadership and a life of deliverance. Moses is to be the instrument of God's salvation.

If you have ever been called to a task that you think is too large for you, then you are in good stead with Moses. Moses was anything but a willing participant in this plan of salvation. He balks. First he claims an identity crisis. "The people will not know who you are. Who shall I say has sent me?" "I am that I am has sent you." "I have nothing to demonstrate to them. They will want signs and miracles." "Take the rod which is in your hand, Moses." He throws it to the ground and it becomes a serpent. He picks it up by the tail and once again it is a rod. A hand, whole and healthy, slipped into his cloak comes out leprous. Again God says, "Now stick it back in your cloak." He does so and it was restored. "The signs which you seek, I shall give unto you." "I am slow of speech." Perhaps it was that Moses stuttered. Perhaps he simply had an inferiority complex saying, "I can not do what you are asking."

Remember when God calls you to some task in life, He doesn't call the equipped, rather, He equips those who He calls. God has called you to something. Every life has a purpose as well as a destiny. What is your purpose? What is your calling in life? If you are retired and you have no calling, GOD HELP YOU! You may have the feeling you are just in God's waiting room and there is little you can do. You may have the "I've served before" attitude. Please remember: your voice needs to be heard and your life lived to the glory of God. God's will need to be discerned in your life.

The command is to go down into Egypt. Little did Moses know what lay in store for him. He takes in tow his brother Aaron who is to speak on his behalf and so they go. They confront Pharaoh. Miracle after miracle is performed; one more dramatic than the last. Following each plague, Pharaoh initially is amenable to letting the people go, only to reverse his decision and become more recalcitrant and hardened. At last the final demonstration. The angel of death sweeps over the land and the first born in every Egyptian household dies. This lethal plague has not touched the Israelites as they have spread blood over their door posts and the angel of death has passed over them.

It says that 600,000 men left the land of Egypt. The count did not include women or children, flocks or herds. Probably a conservative figure would be a million and a half people on the march. The men and women of the various tribes aligned themselves behind their tribal banners and they begin their sojourn into the wilderness. Undoubtedly their emotional companions were joy mixed with uncertainty and fear.

430 years have passed since Jacob has taken his sons, flocks and herds from the land of Canaan and taken up residence in the land of Goshen. Their oppression and slavery is now over and deliverance is at hand. Time and again their faith is to be tested. The Red Sea sees the destruction of the army of Pharaoh. When food and water is lacking, God provides. The people are stiff necked and lack all gratitude, yet God through Moses continues to lead them. A simple lesson for us is that we ought never to forget to give thanks for a loving God who watches over us and provides for our every need.

The people of Israel arrive at the foot of Mount Sinai after a ninety day journey. This is an awesome place and it is from whence Moses had received his call to ministry. The mountain rumbles, smokes, and trembles. The people of Israel are warned not to come near this Holy Mountain. Moses alone is told to ascend the mountain in order to speak with God and to receive the law. The people watch as Moses departs but before long they believe he will not return. They turn to Aaron and ask for a "god" they can see and worship, one they can acknowledge.

Moses receives the Ten Commandments which were written by the very finger of God. God's eye is upon the people He informs Moses of their idolatry. In anger God threatens to destroy the people of Israel and make of Moses' descendants a new nation. Moses intercedes for the people saying that if God does this thing then He ought to strike his name from the book of life as well. Moses descends the mount and confronts Aaron who concocts an elaborate lie which would have been better told by a school boy. He states that the people gave him their jewelry and that he threw it into the fire and what emerged was the golden calf. Moses throws down the commandments of the Lord. The covenant, which has been given, has temporarily been severed. He lays hold of the golden calf and grinds it to dust. He throws the dust upon the water and forces the people to drink it. The people of Israel are punished for their sin.

These are some straight forward lessons for us. Remember when there is an absence of spiritual leadership, whether in the home, community or nation, destruction awaits. If you read the history of the Kings of Israel it is worth noting that as the kings lived so went the nation. Righteous kings brought blessing and evil kings brought destruction.

Sadly there is an absence of spiritual leadership in our government. A government of corruption on all levels in our society is sowing the seeds of destruction. We are sowing the wind but shall reap the whirlwind.

One of the tragedies in our American society is that fathers have abdicated their role as being the spiritual leaders of their households. It is our obligation to lead our little ones in faith. If we fail to instruct them, woe be unto us. Remember the words of our Lord and Savior when he looked at the little children and said, *“If you cause one of these little ones to stumble, better for that man to have not been born but rather a millstone placed about his neck and he be thrown into the depths of the sea.”* We are going to be held responsible for the spiritual lessons that we have taught in the home. Without spiritual direction, little feet will stray.

The second aspect of this story, I believe, is that forgetfulness finds its roots in an ungrateful heart. It says in Holy Scripture, “Remember the Lord God and forget not all his benefits.”

The most wonderful words of praise that you can heap upon your spouse are simply the words, “Thank you, darling”. It affirms their self worth. It affirms that what they are doing for you matters. It affirms in your own life that you appreciate what has been done for you.

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS is the thought here. **NAME THEM ONE BY ONE.** A grateful heart is a heart that is full of praise for all of God’s good gifts and real maturity comes when you can thank God when you are in the midst of suffering. “In all times and circumstances,” St. Paul said, “Therein have I learned to be content. I now realize that in all things God works together for good to them that love him.” Develop a spirit of praise and thanksgiving.

Realize that sin has consequences. Robbie Burns, the poet laureate of Scotland said, “Sin calcifies all within.” With sin comes the death of the mind, the ability to reason, the ability to discern good from evil. When evil has had its way, there is the absence of all goodness. Sin robs you of the ability to love openly and freely. Soon the man or woman who continues to sin without repentance is left as a shell. **NOTHING** of the goodness of God reverberates in them.

For the people of Israel the consequences were severe. On the morrow, Moses said, “Who is on the Lord’s side? Who stands with me?” And the sons of Levi came forward.

This tribe, which was to be consecrated to the glory of a God, went through-out the people and slaughtered 3000 of them. Their punishment is not yet over. A plague was sent amongst the people and thousands died.

In summary, perhaps what this passage is saying to all of us is that there are holy and sacred moments in life when God summons us to some high calling. If we have ears to hear and eyes to see, we can march forward unafraid with the knowledge that God will provide all that we need to accomplish His will.

William Longstaff said it so well:

*“Take time to be holy, let Him be thy guide.
And run not before Him, whatever be tide.
In joy or in sorrow, still follow thy Lord,
And looking to Jesus, still trust in His Word.”*