

Sermon for September 6, 2020

Exodus 12:1-14

Psalm 149

Romans 13:8-14

Matthew 18:15-20

“Transformation”

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS.

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbour in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgements: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer! Amen.

In keeping with the old adage that there is a song about everything, today’s song would be “People Get Ready,” a song you often hear sung in the gravelly voice of Rod Stewart.

The instructions delivered by Moses to the Israelites were quite explicit. One wonders if the patrolling angels could have distinguished blood from three year old female sheep with a broken leg as opposed to the mandated one year old, unblemished male lambs. But that’s just me examining things that shouldn’t be examined.

If you listened to or read my sermon from last week about being called, I ended it with a question: “Called to what?” From what we read today in the story of the Israelites, we are called

to prepare ourselves. This may be necessary, but it seems inconclusive and quite unsatisfying. Normally the preacher is limited to the passages given to him or her via the lectionary. Sometimes it is necessary to do away with normality and look elsewhere in scripture for a conclusion and some satisfaction. We don't have to look that far ahead of the story of preparation for the Passover to find these things.

For what did the Passover lead to? It led to the escape of the chosen people from slavery in Egypt and to their 40 year journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land. It led to freedom. It led to salvation. It led to transformation. That's what I want to examine this morning. We are called. We are called to be transformed and we are called to transform.

We live in a "me" age, so the notion of ourselves being transformed fits right into that mould. But I don't want to dwell in that mould. (You could get awfully mouldy dwelling in a mould. I don't want that.) What I do want to do is to look at what we as transformed people are called to do. We are called to transform the world around us, to improve it and make it better, more just and more merciful. In essence, we are called to make our world a Promised Land. In doing this we make the world more receptive of the love that St. Paul describes to us this morning in his letter to the Romans. Love being the fulfillment of all the commandments. Another song: "What the world needs now is love, sweet love. It's the only thing that there's just too little of."

At this point the sceptics out there are mumbling, "There he goes again. Rambling on about love. As if he's the greatest lover of all time." Well, no. I'm not.

But, I Believe That Love Is The Answer, and there's another song title. All we need to figure out is: what is the question? Love can take many different forms and delivered in many different ways. St. Paul compares the church to a body, with different parts of a body fulfilling different functions as do the different people in the church. If we were all the same and all doing the same things, life would become awfully boring. We are not all called to be doing the same thing, but as I have emphasized, we are all called to be doing something. And that something should be something loving.

As we noted last week, Moses was created and formed for the calling that he eventually received. We too have been created and formed by the same God. In our hurting world, there are many loving things that we can be called to do.

We could be called to pray. If you receive such a call, please remember what Pope Francis has said about prayer. First you pray for the hungry and then you go out and feed them. That's how prayer works. Prayer is not just a sedentary thing. It is also an active thing.

We could be called to be a friend. If that is your calling, please don't be the kind of friends that surrounded Job in his distress. They were the ones who were so sure that Job's problems were of his own making that they tried endlessly to convince him of this. Under those circumstances, a true friend should just listen and let the other person talk if they want to talk. And if they don't want to talk, the friend should still just listen and be there.

I can't overemphasize this. There are many things to be called for. They are not all the same. If everyone was called to preach, who would there be to listen? If everyone was called to heal the sick, who would there be to be healed?

You may ask yourself, are we up to the job? Under our own steam, probably not. But remember what Jesus tells us in today's Gospel passage. If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them. Is there any better way to say, "Don't Worry, Be Happy?" I don't think so.

So to summarize, there is a process of being called. We are all called. We are not all called to do the same thing, but we are all called to do something. If you are searching for a common theme to being called, whatever we are called to do must have something to do with spreading love in the world in order to transform the world.

Have you heard the call? Will you listen for it? Will you answer?

Amen.