

Pentecost XIV September 6, 2020 Rev'd Dr. Shane Scott Hamblen

Exodus 12:1-14, Psalm 149, Romans 13:8-14, Matthew 18:15-20

The readings we're about to hear this morning are a challenging mix.

The first reading is from Exodus- all about the first Passover. I like the first half of it. The Ritual for preparing the Passover Lamb meal – How to cook it, the ritual of how to eat it and especially how we're supposed to share it with our neighbors who can't afford to do it on their own.

But I'm not so sure about the second half of the reading when it gets into smearing blood on our doors, because God's going to kill everyone who doesn't have lamb blood on their doors. I find that hard to reconcile with the non-violence of Jesus's teachings even though I get the symbolism.

Then there's the psalm. It starts out so positive: "Praise God with a New Song" It's bursting with joy and beauty and then it turns to swords, wreaking vengeance, punishment and the binding of kings and nobles in chains.

I'm not sure what to do with that. Though, if I was part of an abused and oppressed community, maybe it would resonate better. Even still, I'd rather have less violence in it.

And again, we'll get a lovely start from the letter from St. Paul. He's going to tell us the summary of the 10 Commandments. Don't be in debt to anyone, except in love. All the Commandments, he's going to tell us can be summed up by the simple one Commandment of Jesus: "Love Your neighbor as yourself" that I can get behind and not just because I can never remember all 10 commandments! "Love thy neighbor and love thyself" that's the stuff I recognize as God's way.

Unfortunately, the reading doesn't stop there. St. Paul goes on to tell us "Lay aside the works of darkness – not reveling debauchery, or licentiousness or drunkenness - asking no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires".

He just slashed away half the things people might need to do to survive shelter in place! Here I'm more in line with the Irish who have a funny saying. "Blessed are the drunkards for they shall see God twice."

Then, as always, we crescendo up to the Gospel and there we'll hear from Jesus himself. Unlike the other readings, I don't find myself liking half and not liking the other half. No, here I find myself a bit confused.

You know how when someone repeats a message to us, it's an indicator that what they're saying might be important for us to hear? This is one of those instances. Once again, Jesus is going to repeat himself by telling us:

“Whatever you Bind on Earth will be Bound in heaven and Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Last Sunday I spoke about that as an incredible Power of God being given to us humans, but maybe I’ve confused Power with Responsibility.

This responsibility to bind at loose people from their sins, I believe, should be used very liberally. If I’m going to get in trouble at my judgement, I’d rather get it wrong by forgiving too many people that Binding too many with the Power of such judgement comes great responsibility. As I see it, all of these reading with their mix of good and violent are about how to live community – to ever expand that circle of community. Are we using the “the Power of the Keys” or our Religion, or own preferences to make the circle of community Bigger, or smaller? Are we about growing or shrinking?

Personally, I hope we will “loose many” and Bind few (or none)! As we pray every day: “Forgive us our debts or trespasses or sins. As much as we forgive others their sins or debts. There’s a Quid pro Quo in that which turns the whole thing around. The same Gospel passage starts with “Conflict Management” (If a member of the Church hurts or sins against you, start gently and speak to the person privately – not shouting or social media. Privately, confidentially, and hopefully it’ll stop there.

If it doesn’t stop, then we’re going to hear that we should slightly expand the circle and bring in one or more. If privately or small circle doesn’t stop the abuse, only then should we involve the whole community.

We almost always listen to this reading as if we are the victim the one offended or hurt. But I’d like to suggest we should listen to it with Fresh Ears and imagine this scenario as if we are the one who has hurt someone else. I think this is how we can switch from Power to Responsibility – Not saying to ourselves “I hope Aunt Marge is listening to this!” “but to “I hope I am listening to this.” Unfortunately, we can be just as bound by our own resentments for things people have done to us. According to what Jesus is going to tell us, those resentments are so binding on us that we risk being bound to them even in Heaven if we don’t let God unbind us from them.

For some reason, the Black Lives Matter movement comes to mind, especially the whole Black Lives Matter/vs All lives matter debate. If my son came to me and asked “Do you love me?” I’d be right to say “I try and love everyone” It be true, but somehow mean & binding.

If a friend came up to me and said “My mom just died”. I could honestly say “Everyone dies” It’d be true but kind of mean.

So when Black people have tried coming up to us privately and nothing changed then they brought in a few more people and told us again in front of witnesses that they are offended, & hurt and that we’ve sinned against their people and nothing changed – we didn’t change and then they went public and told the whole church and the whole world that they are hurt and wounded and cry out “Black Lives Matter” we could respond “All lives matter” and it’d be true, but also mean. So I ask you to listen to these readings with

fresh ears and a totally different perspective where we're not the victims, but maybe we're the offenders.

Then let us, where 2,3, or more are gathered, ask God to help loose as many people as we can not to bind anymore even ourselves but to set God's people free as many as we can
(+) In the name of the Father ...