Exodus 15 - Exodus 40 February 2, 2020

**2020: The Global Year of the Bible**

***A Lamp and a Light, Part 5***

Laurie R Parsons

 Did this week make anyone else say “whew?” Personally, I am very glad to have made it to Sunday and very grateful to be here to worship with such a prayerful and joyful congregation. We have officially made it through the first month of this Global Year of the Bible. Let’s look at where all we have been in the past few weeks. If you are joining us for the first time today, welcome. Our focus this year has been a walk through/journey through the entire Bible. And in this first month we have worked through the book of Genesis looking at Adam & Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Jacob’s twelve sons (primarily Joseph), and last week we started Moses and the book of Exodus, which we will pretty much finish today. If you recall from last week God chose Moses to lead his people (the Israelites, the descendants of Jacob) out of their enslavement and oppression in Egypt. God used ten plagues to prove his power to both the Egyptians and to the Israelites. Each plague attacked a different Egyptian god directly. They showed God was and is all-powerful and the Egyptian gods were completely and utterly helpless. Pretty interesting right. And so the Israelites were led out of Egypt and crossed the Red Sea on dry land singing and lifting up praise to the God that rescued them from their oppressors. It will be at this point that we will pick up the story once again. But first let’s pray.

 *Heavenly Father, thank you for your Word that has guided us this past month. Thank you for continually teaching us new lessons and opening up our eyes to see you. Thank you for our faith history that continues to teach us today. As we listen to your word today, soften our hearts to what you have to say to us and open our eyes to see you more clearly. As always, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be pleasing and glorifying to you. Amen.*

I’m sure many of you have gone on road trips and have experienced the dreaded question of “are we there yet?” I must confess I was one of those children that had to ask that question. I think I even had a Rugrats watch that asked that question (not surprisingly that watch mysteriously disappeared one day). The excitement of a trip and the destination quickly wears off during the journey and this is where we pick up our story of the Israelite people. Starting in Exodus 15:22 we read, “*Then Moses led the people of Israel away from the Red Sea, and they moved out into the desert of Shur. They traveled in this desert for three days without finding any water. When they came to the oasis of Marah, the water was too bitter to drink. So they called the place Marah (which means “bitter”). Then the people complained and turned against Moses. ‘What are we going to drink?’ they demanded. So Moses cried out to the Lord for help and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. Moses threw it into the water, and this made the water good to drink.”* Three days...it took the people three days out of Egypt to start complaining and turn against Moses and ultimately God. I’d like to think that I would last three days after a miraculous rescue before complaining, but I am just as human as the Israelites and so the likelihood is not good.

 This is not the only time the people will complain on their journey. Again in Exodus 16:1-3, “*Then the whole community of Israel set out from Elim and journeyed into the Wilderness of Sin, between Elim and Mount Sinai. They arrived there on the fifteenth day of the second month, one month after leaving the land of Egypt. There, too, the whole community of Israel complained about Moses and Aaron. ‘If only the Lord had killed us back in Egypt,’ they moaned. ‘There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death.”*

For a third time they complained at Meribah in the desert. “*At the Lord’s command, the whole community of Israel left the wilderness of Sin and moved from place to place. Eventually they camped at Rephidim, but there was no water there for the people to drink. So once more the people complained against Moses. ‘Give us water to drink!’ they demanded. ‘Quiet!’ Moses replied. ‘Why are you complaining against me? And why are you testing the Lord?’ But tormented by thirst, they continued to argue with Moses. ‘Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Are you trying to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?”*

Time and time again the people of Israel are complaining about their circumstances and are certainly testing Moses and possibly even God’s patience with their stubborness. However, after reading this passage several times this week for me all I can see is God’s testing of his people and his preparation of them to enter the Promised Land. He’s giving them time and opportunities to trust and have faith in him. To put all their dependence on him and to learn how to live as his people. For if they can’t live as his people when they are the only ones in the desert, they will certainly have trouble living as his people when true temptation arises as they live around the Canaanites.

 What I don’t like or agree with about this passage is that this section of Israel’s history is often times called the “wandering” in the desert, as if they had no idea where they were going. For to wander means to walk around casually, leisurely, and without aim so I’m sure the Israelites might have felt that way. However, I’ve learned that God doesn’t do anything aimlessly. There is a purpose and reason for his actions. So as I am reading this passage I know that God could have led them to places of good water and food and could have led them on a direct path to the Promised Land, but he didn’t. He wouldn’t because his people were not yet ready. His people were not mature enough in their faith to enter into the full promise God gave to Israel, Isaac, and Abraham. They did not yet know how to live as a people set apart as God told them they would be in Exodus 19, “*Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.”* The Israelites needed to learn how to do this; how to be a nation of priests whose allegiance was to an eternal, invisible King.

 This is what the rest of the book of Exodus is about...teaching his people how to be his people. The ten commandments, the Tabernacle, and the ordination of priests in all their details are to give specific instructions on how God’s people can be his people in a world that has turned its back on its Creator. Clearly the Israelites were not yet ready for this task as they pressured Aaron to make for them a Golden Calf to worship. They were not yet mature enough to put their full dependence on God. And God knew this, which is why he made the way for them to atone for their unfaithfulness. Directly after the Ten Commandments, God gives instructions to build an altar to offer sacrifices because God knew that people would never be able to uphold perfectly the law. God knew that humanity would never be able to measure up and yet he still remained faithful to his people.

He remained so faithful to them that he gave them instructions to make the place where he will dwell among them. Be honest, how many people struggled with all the details on the Tabernacle this week? I’m a visual learner so I needed to watch videos and look at pictures of what the Tabernacle looked like and what were all these details about. And then it clicked...the Israelites were used to seeing kings in grand palaces with grandiose detail and intricacy. God as their King needed a palace of his own so that the people would remember that God is Lord. Hence all the colors of blue, purple, and scarlet...signs of royalty. But also there is symbolism of Eden within the Tabernacle itself. Cherubim on the cloth at the entrance of the Most Holy Place guard the place where God dwells as Cherubim were placed to guard Eden. The lampstand with its six branches is thought to represent the Tree of Life that was in the Garden. He is essentially giving them a new, portable Eden...a place where they can commune and talk to God. A place where one person, the High Priest, can intercede on behalf of the people. A place full of the reminders of what God has done for and given to them.

Throughout this section of Scripture God is constantly showing and providing his people with reminders of who he is and how he alone is faithful. This is what stood out to me as I read and re-read this week’s passages. It’s actually been a constant theme as we have read through Genesis and Exodus. Even though we, humanity, do not and cannot remain faithful to God. God remains faithful to us and even wants to dwell in and with us. We complain about our circumstances just as the Israelites did (I can relate to the Israelites in a way that I complain more when I am hungry and tired, but that’s not an excuse.) What baffles me is that they complained when the presence of God was right in front of them...in the pillar of cloud and fire, in the storm of the Mountain, when the presence of God dwelt in the Tabernacle within their own camp! After God did all these miraculous signs and wonders to get them out of Egypt and after God provided for them! How could they remain so unfaithful to the LORD!

And then I look at my own life and what God has done for me and I am humbled and brought down to my knees. No, God didn’t lift me out of Egypt, but he lifted me from death to life! He rescued my life from the grave through the death of the Son. I think of my High Priest who has interceded on my behalf. As Dave reminded us so beautifully last week Isaiah 53, “*My servant grew up in the Lord’s presence like a tender green shoot, like a root in dry ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him. He was despised and rejected - a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrow that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all...But it was the Lord’s good plan to crush him and cause him grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have many descendants. He will enjoy a long life, and the Lord’s good plan will prosper in his hands. When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied. And because of his experience, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins.”* God himself made the ultimate sacrifice for me and for you, and yet we still complain, grumble, and try to live on our own strength. We still think that we are wandering around aimlessly like God doesn’t know exactly where he is leading us or what he is trying to teach us.

We cry out to God and perhaps God is telling us to wait...I am preparing the way and I am preparing you for something greater. Before I get to the finishing touches of building this house, I need to build a firm foundation and put up sturdy walls. I am teaching you something during this time of trial so that my light may shine more clearly through you when you come out the other side. We cannot always tell where or why God is leading us in a certain direction, but we need to keep our faith and trust in the one who is leading us, who is transforming us into the image of his Son, Jesus Christ. The one whose name is El Shaddai (God Almighty), El Elyon (The Most High God), Adonai (Lord), Yahweh (the Self-existent One), Jehovah Nissi (the Lord is My Banner), Jehovah Rapha (the Lord who Heals), Jehovah Jireh (The Lord Will Provide), El Roi (the God who sees), Elohim (Creator God), and Abba (Father). While we may not always remain faithful to God, he will continually remain faithful to us. For he has proven it time and time again. The Lord has proven his faithfulness at Calvary, by giving us his Son as a ransom for our sins. And he continues to be faithful to us today by giving us His Spirit. His Spirit to uplift, to guide, to correct, and to strengthen us in our weakness.

And he has given us a community to help us be faithful as we follow him. A community to help hold us accountable and to live life with one another. So much more could be expanded from this text, but I do want to point out that God did not call us to do it alone. Moses had Aaron, Hur, Joshua, Jethro (his father-in-law) to give him wisdom in appointing seventy other leaders who could hold the people accountable, and Aaron’s sons as priests for the people. Without community and accountability we are so apt to turn our back on God. We are so prone to wander away from him like a child wanders away at Disney because they saw something shinier that caught their eye. If we are going to remain faithful to God in this life we need to rely on the Spirit and the power of Christ inside us, but also we need to stay connected and accountable to one another. Let us keep praying and interceding for one another in prayer. Let us keep fellowshipping with one another on Sunday’s and during the week. Let us keep checking in on one another and reminding one another that the Lord is faithful and working in ways that we cannot see or grasp yet. Let us keep our eyes on Jesus so that we may not grow weary, but may be filled with his light and strength to remain faithful to what God has called us to do. Remembering always that God is forever faithful to us.