

Sermon 6-9-2020, Year A. Readings: Exodus 12:1-14, Romans 13:8-14,
Matthew 18:15 - 20.

Let us Pray: Gracious Lord in Your love You gave Jesus to show us Your loving heart and face. We celebrate that love each time we come together in worship. As we listen for Your word this morning may we again be overwhelmed by Your love, grace and desire to draw us into a closer relationship with You. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

We as Humans, love to celebrate. We love to celebrate important events in our lives, like birthdays and weddings and anniversaries and graduations. In the next little while it will be Elizabeth and Philip's 50 Wedding Anniversary and in this time of lockdown, they won't be able to celebrate in quite the same way as they might have. These special times are important events and when we celebrate these important events, we are remembering the joy of the event and each year when we celebrate an anniversary, we remember the joy of the original occasion. In our reading from Exodus today, we are hearing the story of the preparation for the first Passover, the event that will finally win freedom for the Hebrew slaves. God tells Moses that "This is a day you are to commemorate for the generations to come, you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord." Why? So that the Nation would remember the great and wonderful things God has done for them. God showed His great love for the people and also showed His power as the one true God by defeating the gods of Egypt in might and power.

Just as Passover is the celebration to remember the great things that God has done for the Jewish people, Holy Communion reminds us of the great and wonderful thing that Jesus did to redeem us. Just as the blood of the lamb saved the children of Israel, the blood of Jesus Christ has saved the world. When we celebrate Communion, we remember the love and grace of God that, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us!" But our memory should not just be jogged only when we come to Church or when we celebrate Communion, it should be a daily thing. During our time of lockdown, it is really important for us to daily tap into God. We need to spend time daily with God by reading the Bible and prayer. Our faith should not be a "once a week on Sunday" thing, but a daily connecting with God. The closer the relationship the more God like we will become.

God is love, and if we want to become more like God, we need to be people who build a relationship with God and then reflect that love. In Romans, we read that "no debt should remain outstanding except for the debt to love one another." Why is love for others called a debt? We are permanently in debt to Christ for the lavish love He has poured on us and continues to pour on us. The only way we can begin to repay the debt is by loving others in return. Because Christ's love will always be infinitely greater than ours, we will always have an obligation to love our neighbours. Love is the principle by which all else is measured. It is the key for those who live under the grace of Christ.

I guess that it is fair to say, we often dress for the occasion. When I go out to work in the garden, I wear gardening clothes I am not much of a gardener but I look the part. When I dress up like a clown, I look the part but I am not a clown, but some of you probably think I am! When I wear my Alb and Scarf, I am a Pastor, I look like a Pastor and I am a Pastor. The other gear could almost be called a "dress up" but the Alb and Scarf are for real. Paul tells us to "Put on Christ, to clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ." When you put on Christ, it is not just a dress up, because to put on Christ, is to act like Christ. We put on Christ when we let go of ourselves and allow Christ to take over our lives and as we do that, we become more like Christ in all that we do.

When we spend time in communal worship, we are taking the time to discover that God's love for us is unconditional, that we are encouraged to love one another within our Church family and then to take that love out into the community. We have an obligation towards one another. We are called to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. Now many of us struggle with the concept that we should love ourselves and care for ourselves? But it is important for us to understand that self-love and self-care is not wrong. If we don't think we are supposed to love and care for ourselves then how could we ever love our neighbours as ourselves? When we are loved by God in such an amazing way, we should respond by not just sharing that love with others but allowing some of that love to be part of our reaction to ourselves.

Love is the essence of what Matthew is talking about in the Gospel reading. He talks about how we should treat one another in love, that if we have a problem with someone, we should talk to them in love and with compassion. Why? Because that is how God deals with us, in love and in care. The Bible tells us, "where two or three are gathered in my name, there I will be also." So, at any gathering of brothers and sisters in Christ we need to remember that Christ is also present and we should act as if Christ is present. When we do coffee together, or work in the garden together, or even ZOOM worship together, we need to remember that Christ is there with us. Church happens wherever Christ is present, not just on Sundays when we gather in our Church building. We can count on Christ's presence, where two or three are united in obedience to Christ and in harmony with one another. When there is agreement on earth, then earth is more like heaven, and the prayer we pray truly together can move both heaven and earth.

So, what is all this really saying to us? I believe that it is saying that God is a God of presence. God wants to be in relationship with His people. He chose to be in relationship with the Israelites, not because they were all that faithful all of the time but because He had made a covenant with His Faithful Patriarchs. God loves us, God created us and wants to have a loving and lasting relationship with us. Jesus came to show us God's amazing love and then He died, to show that love, and to remove the road block of sin and open the way, so that we can live and grow stronger in our relationship with God. As brothers and sisters in Christ it is important for us to build bridges, not walls, to patiently walk alongside one another under the same need of divine grace. We celebrate the important anniversaries of life because it helps us to remember the occasion. We celebrate God and our important anniversaries with God because we want to remember all that God has done for us. When we celebrate communion, we remember all that God has done for us through Jesus Christ. We know that Christ is present with us because that is the promise, to be with us when we gather in His name. As we put on Christ daily, we grow in the knowledge of the love that God has for us. We are indeed a chosen people because God loves us unconditionally. Jesus died and rose again so that our relationship with God could become stronger and more life giving. As we continue to love God and our neighbour may we grow to become more like our God of grace and love. May our lives reflect that love as we live as a people clothed in Christ Jesus. Amen.