

A reading from the book of Exodus.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

On the third month
after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt,
they came into the wilderness of Sinai.
They had journeyed from Rephidim,
entered the wilderness of Sinai,
and camped in the wilderness;
Israel camped there in front of the mountain.
Then Moses went up to God;
the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying,
“Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob,
and tell the children of Israel:
‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians,
and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.
Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant,
you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples.
Indeed, the whole earth is mine,
but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.’
These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

Rephidim = **REF**-ih-dim

PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – A 11

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

While we were still weak,

at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person –

though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.

But God proves his love for us

in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Much more surely then,

now that we have been justified by his blood,

will we be saved through him from the wrath of God.

For if while we were enemies,

we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son,

much more surely, having been reconciled,

will we be saved by his life.

But more than that,

we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

through whom we have now received reconciliation.



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – A 11

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord

When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them,
because they were under pressure and helpless,
like sheep without a shepherd.

Then he said to his disciples,
“The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few;
therefore ask the Lord of the harvest
to send out labourers into his harvest.”

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples
and gave them authority over unclean spirits,
to cast them out,
and to cure every disease and every sickness.

These are the names of the twelve Apostles:
first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew;
James son of Zebedee, and his brother John;
Philip and Bartholomew;
Thomas and Matthew the tax collector;
James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;
Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot,
the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions:

“Go nowhere among the Gentiles,
and enter no town of the Samaritans,
but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

As you go, proclaim the good news,
‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’

Cure the sick, raise the dead,
cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.

You received without payment;
give without payment.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

EXODUS - THE ISRAELITES ARRIVE IN SINAI 19:2-6

If *ḥodeš* is to be translated 'new moon', the people arrive at Sinai ten weeks after the Pasch. If we translate it 'month', the time since Pasch is not as definite. In the narrative as it is presented in Exodus, Moses went ahead from Rephidim to Horeb (Sinai) with the elders, where he struck the mountain with God's staff and God caused water to gush forth for the people (17:6). It was there, too, that he held the staff out over the battlefield (17:9). Chapter eighteen leads us to assume that he returned to Rephidim. Now he brings the people to the mountain. 'On that very day' is fulfilled YHWH's promise to Moses (3:12): not only he, but the people he has led out of Egypt, have arrived safely at YHWH's sacred abode. We stay with them there till the end of the Book of Exodus, and the kind of literature changes dramatically.

To this point we have been reading the Bible's favourite way of communicating truth: through stories that have, for the most part, a history of oral transmission prior to their being committed to writing in various places till they found their final place here in the Book of Exodus put together in post-exilic Judah. Now the journeying stops, and the stories are few, as the priest authors write of the various religious observances, legal practices and cultic institutions central to the community life of Israel, presented as revealed and commanded by God through Moses on Mount Sinai.

As a people formed by God, the people of Israel judged that everything essential to their life was inspired by God. Their ethical and cultural life, especially their cult, was what God required of them in response to his choice of them as his special people. Their fidelity in these matters was their side of the covenant they had with God.

There is wide agreement among scholars that large slabs of Exodus 19-40 (especially 25-31 and 35-40) comes from the Priestly School (P). However, some of the legal material is among the oldest writing in the Bible (especially 21:18 - 23:19 and 34:17-26). The influence of the Deuteronomistic School is sometimes apparent (especially 34:10-16); some of the material may well have been composed in the northern kingdom prior to the collapse of Samaria (721BC), and some comes from writers in Judah after the exile in Babylon (and perhaps before as well). In some places the final authors have blended a number of originally independent traditions into their text. One such place is chapter nineteen which introduces this whole section.

Perhaps the simplest way to understand 19:3-8 is to see it as a summary statement covering the whole of the Sinai material. It begins by highlighting Moses' mediatory role (19:3) - something that will be stressed throughout. It goes on to remind us that the escape from Egypt and the safe crossing of the wilderness is God's work: 'I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself' (19:4).

Verse five opens with a typical formula of covenant renewal. YHWH is offering them a wonderful intimacy and a wonderful mission, but it can happen only 'if you obey my voice and keep my covenant' (19:5). Obedience to 'God's voice' is essential to the identity and life of Israel. The details, covering every aspect of their life, are the subject of the rest of this Book. We have already seen some elements linked directly to the Exodus: observing the Pasch and the festival of Unleavened Bread as a perpetual ordinance (12:15,24), and the consecration and redemption of the firstborn son (13:12). We have also been

introduced to the observance of the sabbath (16:23), linked to the giving of the manna. But to this point, the accent has been on what YHWH is doing.

These introductory verses ensure that, even though we are going to listen as every detail of the community's life is laid out before us, we do not forget that we are responding in this way to what YHWH is doing. It is obviously important that we freely welcome God's will for us; hence the necessity of obedience - of listening to God's voice. But our response is precisely that: a response. We must never take our eyes off what it is that God is offering, expressed here in a sublime way via three images: God is calling us to be his 'treasured possession', 'a priestly people', and 'a holy nation'. Before we hear any of the details regulating the life of the people so that they can welcome this wonderful intimacy of divine communion, we are told that the people willingly accepted them: 'Everything that YHWH has spoken we will do'(19:8). The covenant is sealed.

The authors of Exodus offer three images to express what it is that God is offering his people. The first image: though 'the whole earth is mine, you shall be my treasured possession (segullâ) out of all the peoples'(19:5). This special intimacy and communion is expressed especially in Deuteronomy.

The second image: 'you shall be for me a priestly kingdom'(19:6). 'Treasured possession' speaks of Israel's relationship with YHWH. 'Priestly kingdom' speaks of Israel's relationship to God's world. As YHWH's own kingdom, and 'for me' they are to mediate his word to the world, and draw the world into communion with him. This picks up an essential element of the promise made to Abraham: a theme that permeates Genesis: 'in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed'(Genesis 12:3).

The third image: 'You shall be for me a holy nation'(19:6). Every element of their life as a nation is to demonstrate their consecration to YHWH. The expression 'holy nation' is unique.

In his First Letter (2:9), Peter sees the Christian community as fulfilling Exodus 19:6. You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

ROMANS 5:6-11

This communion in love has been made possible because 'Christ died for us': "God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him." - 1 Thessalonians 5:10

This is not something which we have earned, for it was 'while we were still sinners' that Christ gave his life for us. It is this that demonstrates the 'righteousness of God'. We are at the heart of the good news. If God were to cease loving us when we sinned, there would be no hope. But God is love, and Jesus has shown that sin does not stop God loving us. Jesus' whole life demonstrates this, for he chose to be with us sinners, not because he approves of our sin, but because he knows that only the experience of being loved could give a sinner both the awareness that change was possible and the grace to repent. We are

justified by love, God's love, and God's love in unconditionally offered. For our part we are to welcome this love by faith. If we remain obstinate in sin, we can continue to reject God's offer. If we pull down the blinds, our souls will remain in darkness. The good news is that the sun of God's love never stops shining upon us. If we dare to believe and so open our heart to the love that is being poured into them by the Holy Spirit, we will experience forgiveness, healing and the communion in which justification consists.

'We have been justified by his blood'(compare Acts 20:28). Recall Paul's words in his correspondence with Corinth: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?" - 1Corinthians 10:16

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." - 1Corinthians 11:25

The language is sacrificial. How are we to understand being 'justified by his blood' and being 'saved through him from the wrath of God'? For a reflection on the notion of 'the wrath of God' and of 'divine punishment' see the commentary on 1Thessalonians 1:10. We must reject the suggestion that we are freed because God punished Christ instead of us. Jesus was innocent. He could not be the object of the 'punishment of God'.

We must also reject the suggestion that God pretends that we are other than we really are, and simply chooses, because of what Jesus did, not to punish us. This would involve God declaring us to be righteous in spite of the fact that we are not. Divine punishment is not an extra that God can put aside at will. It is the consequence of the disorder that sin is and that sin causes. The only way to avert the punishment is to get rid of the sin of which it is the result.

God was always leading people to repentance (See 2:4), but prior to Christ we remained under sin's domination. Now, thanks to what God has revealed in Christ, in his life-giving on the cross, 'by his blood', repentance is possible, and so is forgiveness and salvation from the effects of sin.

We sin because we do not believe in God's love. God wanted to convince us of his love. He did so in Jesus, in Jesus' living and life-giving. In spite of all the efforts to stop Jesus believing in God's love, even the threat of death, he remained faithful. Others failed to listen, failed to believe or to obey, and went ahead with his murder. Jesus made a love-offering even of his death, and the resurrection showed that he was right to do so. People acting sinfully, and therefore acting contrary to God's will, put Jesus to death. God raised him to life, proving that he was as Jesus believed him to be. God used the example of Jesus' faith to open our hearts to the desire to believe as Jesus believed. By giving us a share in Jesus' faith, through the gift of Jesus' Spirit, God made it possible for us to carry out this desire to believe.

This same Spirit sustains in us a life that is free from the domination of sin. Sin is still possible, and if we sin we must still suffer the consequences. But it is now possible to repent of sin. It is now possible not to sin, and therefore by God's grace to be righteous, and so to avoid punishment and attain salvation. On our own this is not possible, but we are not on our own: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me'(Galatians 2:20). God manifests his righteousness in the death of Jesus, not by inflicting his anger upon him as a

substitute sacrifice, but by showing, through the resurrection, that he is faithful to the trust Jesus placed in him. The life he gave to Jesus he will give to all who share Jesus' faith.

The murder of Jesus is not a manifestation of God's punishment. It is a manifestation of human sin at its worst, and therefore of human disobedience. Jesus' way of responding to this sinful act is a manifestation of his persistent love for others, and persistent faith in God. The resurrection reveals that a death, even a murder, accepted in faith and offered in love, can be 'a power for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek'(1:16).

How is this possible? Because the faith of Jesus inspires and makes possible a sharing in his faith by others. By believing - something we can do because Jesus shares his faith with us - we welcome God's offer of communion and are brought into a right relationship with God (5:1). What Jesus did makes our faith possible. It does not, however, substitute for it. If we reject the offer of a share in his faith, we will not be able to resist being dominated by sin, and we will not evade the punishment which is consequent upon it. Only that person is redeemed who accepts God's offer and lives accordingly.

Our exulting now and our security as regards the future is not based on something that has happened outside ourselves. It is based on our certainty concerning who God is, and the experience of God's Spirit that we enjoy when we choose to base our lives on this conviction. Christ has freed us from sin's dominion and has made it possible for us to be 'reconciled'(see 2 Corinthians 5:17-20) and to be 'saved by his life'. We are free to accept or reject this grace.

We are now in a position to grasp more fully why Paul chose to begin his exposition of the gospel by describing the 'wrath of God'. He did so in order to demonstrate that even the disorders that result from sin manifest clearly that people will not find life apart from communion with God. Furthermore the terrible effects of sin are themselves a manifestation of the 'power of God for salvation' (1:16). They are an instrument of God's passionate concern to draw everyone, Jew and Greek, to repentance. God's anger is itself part of the gospel, for it lifts what could appear to be merely a hopeless human condition into the sphere of grace, thus giving hope to all who cry out to be released from it: "and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." - Romans 5:5

The 'wrath of God' is part of the revelation of God's righteousness (1:17), manifesting God's concern and his fidelity to his promises, as well as God's will that all recognise their need for life and find it through faith in Christ.

In the verses we have just examined, Paul has touched on three aspects of how the change is effected which takes us from the degradation of sin into the intimacy of divine communion. The first is our experience of union with Christ in his dying, in his self-giving in faith and love upon the cross: 'While we still were sinners Christ died for us'(5:8). The second is our experience of his living and life-giving Spirit, now dwelling in us and empowering us to live in union with him: 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us'(5:5). The third is our faith, based on these experiences, that Jesus is alive, in glory, having been raised to life by God. It enables us to exult in the hope of being with him in glory: 'much more, surely, having been reconciled, shall we be saved by his life'(5:10).

MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

The parallel pattern of behaviour between Jesus and his apostles is nowhere more striking than in Matthew's Gospel. In today's Gospel passage the narration zooms in, first on Jesus himself (9:35-36), then on the disciples in general (9:37-38), then the twelve apostles by name and vocation (10:1-8). With the movement from Jesus' own ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing (9:35) to that of his followers we might expect a thick line to be drawn between him and his "apostles" (the only occurrence of this word in Matthew). There is only one Jesus, after all, and even his closest followers are but a pale reflection.

Just look at the makeup of the twelve: the "first" apostle Peter will deny the Lord three times and the last apostle Judas will betray him to death, while two apostles in between held opposite positions on the Roman occupation (tax collector Matthew worked for them, while Simon the Cananaean or "zealot" worked against them). And yet the passage ends where it begins, but this time with these assorted apostles now entrusted with Jesus' work of proclamation (10:7) and healing (10:8).

The litany of powers designating the apostles in 10:8 could double for Jesus' own resume: "cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." Jesus not only sends them out with power to authenticate the kingdom's nearness but to announce it by using the very same words as their teacher: "The kingdom of heaven has come near" (10:7; Jesus in 4:17; John in 3:2). In Matthew, Jesus' followers include the original audience as well as us. We are expected to resemble him in word and deed. To be sent by Jesus is, in some sense, to be sent as Jesus.

Naturally, we may bristle at such a thought, ever sensitive to the dangers of saviour-complexes and self-aggrandizement. Nevertheless, Matthew does not hold back from reminding us that master and apprentice, while clearly distinct in their roles, inevitably bear a resemblance to one another. In fact, a good teacher should be recognizable in her student as much as a master craftsman's craft is evident in the work of an apprentice. As Jesus makes clear a bit later: "it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master" (10:25).

Sometimes lost in the comparisons and contrasts between the lists of apostles (see Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13) is the fact that the naming scenes occur in quite different settings. After receiving their apostolic commission in Mark's Gospel, it says quite unremarkably that "Jesus went home" (3:20). Luke's appointment of the apostles has a bit more detail. Jesus spends a whole night in prayer (6:12-13), yet immediately after they are named Jesus accompanies them down the mountain to begin his "sermon on the plain" (6:20-49). The actual sending of the "twelve" in Luke comes later (9:1-6; cf. 10:1-24). The anticipation with which we may have looked upon their prayerful selection goes unfulfilled, or it is at least postponed.

With Matthew, we encounter something altogether different. Jesus seems to be in the thick of fulfilling his Father's mission—preaching, teaching, healing—when he inducts his disciples into the same vocation. While the narrator's word about Jesus' compassion for his sheep (9:36) reminds us of the foundation of Jesus' mission, his commission introduces a different image: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (9:37-38). Paired with Jesus'

compassion is a sense of urgency. The time is ripe for their mission, so he summons them and gives them “authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness” (10:1).

The language is striking because it is a near mirror image of the words used to describe Jesus’ own practice in 9:35: “Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching ... and proclaiming ... and curing every disease and every sickness.” At this moment the narrator introduces the twelve by name. In other words, the list of names does not stand alone as a mere registry of the twelve but as an introduction to an apostleship “charter.” In this way we recognize that part of Jesus’ own mission is to train followers to join the purposes for which his Father sent him. And the apostles’ very identity is born in the midst of this movement from Father to Son to world. If, at this moment, we remembered Jesus’ words in John, “as the father sent me, so I send you” (20:21), we would not be far afield.

The emphasis on identity in mission continues after the list: “These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions...” (10:5). Their mission is not one that they must work out on their own. Jesus gives specific instructions on where to go and whom to visit, on what to say and what to do. We are left with the distinct impression that the twelve are defined by their participation in the ongoing movement of the kingdom into the world.

If we were to represent “kingdom” and “world” in a Venn diagram, the apostles—and we by extension—have been selected and instructed to occupy the overlap. Something of the intensity of this overlap is depicted in Jesus’ extended instructions in 10:9-23. Like “sheep into the midst of wolves” (10:16) Jesus is sending them. Where the work of God meets the trajectory of the world resistance is greatest—they will be handed over to councils, flogged in synagogues (10:17), dragged before governors and kings (10:18), families will be divided (10:21), and stigmas borne because of Jesus’ name (10:22).

And yet, with a promise anticipating the very end of the gospel, Jesus reminds his followers “do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say ... for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (10:19-20). In the very midst of persecution those obedient to Jesus’ mission will be equipped and empowered with God’s own presence. “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (28:20). To participate in the proclamation and healing characteristic of Jesus’ own mission is to get caught up in the very life of God’s Son given to the world.

If, with this passage, we see Jesus in the midst of training disciples for mission, by Gospel’s end the scene will have shifted. The instructions on how to be a disciple in mission will, with the backing of the Risen Lord, become instructions on how to make disciples in mission (Matthew 28:18-20).