

Exodus 19:2-8a; Psalm 100;
Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:8

Grace and peace to God who was, who is, and who is to come.

According to the story so far, the family of Israel, who is also known as Jacob (of the ladder fame) had moved to Egypt generations ago, thanks to his son Joseph (of the Broadway fame) because they wanted to avoid a famine. Now the famine came and went, and the people stayed. And stayed; and stayed; and stayed a little bit longer. They kind of overstayed their welcome there in Egypt. We know this because scripture says that a Pharaoh came to power “who did not know Joseph.” That’s a good, because, of Course that Pharaoh didn’t know Joseph, because at that point Joseph had been *dead* for several hundred years.

Pharaoh wanted to get rid of the descendants of Abraham (Abraham was Joseph’s great-grandfather). So he started one of the earliest reported genocides against the Hebrew people. They cry out to the Lord God Almighty. The Lord God Almighty sheds a little “light” on this “burning” issue by sending them this guy named Moses. But you can read about this in Exodus 3. (I know, there I go, telling you to go home and read your bible again. But you see, Lutherans used to be really biblically literate. We used to be the ones who would go around quoting scripture but we’ve gotten away from that. We say that God speaks to us in many and various ways. God speaks to us through scripture; God also speaks to us through the body of Christ. Unfortunately we’ve gotten to the point where we depend more upon hearing the word of God from the body than we have from scripture, which is *really* unfortunate because as Christians who worship in the Lutheran Tradition, we are the ones who are supposed to be the middle of the road. We’re supposed to be the ones on the top of the fence, while those wackos on the right and those yahoos over on the left are busy arguing at each other through the fence, we are supposed to be above everything, looking around to see everything that needs to get done. But we’ve gotten away from that because we have gotten too far away from scripture. How many of you have a Bible with you today? Not a whole lot of you. We need to get back into reading scripture. Ok, I’m done ranting.) (The Magliozzi brothers on “Car Talk” don’t have anything on me).

Ok, Moses goes to Pharaoh, they go toe to toe, and here is the big surprise: Pharaoh loses to Moses. Before Pharaoh can change his mind, Moses says to the people to get out of Dodge. Pharaoh cries “foul” but he’s all washed up, and his army gets carried away. Here they are, out in the wilderness. They don’t know exactly where they are going, but the Lord God guides them by a pillar of fire at night, and a pillar of cloud (or smoke) during the day. They have to have this as a “highway marker” because we are talking about several hundred thousand people who are leaving Egypt and going to wherever. Along the way they get hungry; so God gives them manna in the morning (manna is kind of like Pillsbury crescent roll - you gather it up, you bake it, you’ve got bread). God sends them quail in the evening. When they get thirsty Moses takes his staff and strikes a rock and they have water. They have problems because they are human beings and they can’t get along with each other. So they go to Moses and complain and complain some

more. Moses father-in-law, Jethro, has the bright idea and helps him to set up a higher and lower report system. (Ok, that's a really brief synopsis of Exodus 13-18. Go home and read it).

Finally, we get to our story of this morning. There they are in Sinai. Today we would call that Saudi Arabia. They are not at the mountain yet (you probably hopefully know the story of the mountain where Moses goes up and gets the instruction manual). There's not been anything about any golden calf yet. God speaks to Moses. God reminds Moses that, when they're in trouble, when they call out to God, the Lord God Almighty hears them and saves them. The Lord God acts on what they ask, and the people respond. God speaks; the people listen. God calls; the people answer. God first; then the people. So how many of us actually work that way? God first and then me.

Or if I can ask it this way: why are you here? Not the existential question of why do we exist? Why are you here, today, in this place, at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, on this Sunday morning? I mean, it's a nice day. It finally got a little cooler than what it's been. Wouldn't you rather be out playing golf or out on the river, or sleeping in, or doing the crossword puzzle, or taking a bicycle ride? Wouldn't you rather be doing any of that stuff than be sitting here? Wouldn't it be a whole lot more fun? Are you here because you **have** to be, or are you here because you **want** to be? (Now I am fully aware that there are at least two people here today under the age of fifteen who **are** here because they **have** to be. And they haven't given me a Father's Day card yet.) As for the rest of us, it's Sunday morning. We go to church on Sunday morning, it's what we do. (Or maybe you go on Saturday night. Did you know we have a Saturday night worship, right here, in this room? It's at 5:30PM, they normally have a rather bouncy guy giving the sermon there; last night they were blessed with Pastor Easton - you guys got stuck with the bouncy guy) But, why are you here? It's Sunday morning.

Remember just a little bit ago we heard those words from Paul, "We are justified by faith." Wait a minute! We're justified by faith; not by my actions; not by what I do? So, I don't **have** to **be** here? Well then Hello Circuit City and the Father's Day sale! I'm going for that PSP I've been looking at. If I don't **have** to be here, Why. Are. You. Here?

The Lord God spoke to Moses and said, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. 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." (Exodus 19:4-6) In other words, 'This is what I have done for you, because of your faith. Now, live like you believe.'

Paul says we are justified not by our works, but rather by our faith. So why are we here? Because we have to be? Didn't God say to the Israelites, 'This is what I have done for you. Because of that you will obey me', or did God really say, 'I have done this for you, out of love. Now, won't you, out of love also, do as I have asked?' Is it, 'Do this or else'; or is it, 'I love you. If you love me, this is the way you will live. You'll treat others fairly; you'll love yourself; you'll listen to my heart. We **are** justified by faith. That doesn't mean that we are not called. (Yes, that's a double negative, which makes a positive.) We **are** called. We **are** justified by faith. We don't have to do anything, because in the long run, or even in the short run, we can't do anything to earn God's love.

What we do instead is to live our lives like we honestly believe what we say we do. So what good does it do to you to come here for an hour and a half, once a week? It gathers us, it brings us together, it brings you in contact with other believers. This gathering brings you in to corporate worship where you love God not only by yourself, but with others. We are here because we love God. We are here because God calls us to love one another. We are here because we want to be. We are here because we can do no other. Yes, we are humans and we will hurt one another and we are not always supportive at all times. Yet still God calls us to be here. To love and support each other whether we want to or not.

I want to share with you a true story from Fred Craddock. For those of you who do not know the name Fred Craddock, he is one of the truly amazing preachers of the 21st Century. He has a book entitled “Craddock Stories” In it, he writes about an event with his father:

My mother took us to church and Sunday school; my father didn't go. I complained about Sunday dinner being late when she came home. Sometimes the preacher would call, and my father would say, "I know what the church wants. Church doesn't care about me. Church wants another name, another pledge, another name, another pledge. Right? Isn't that the name of it? Another name, another pledge." That's what he always said.

Sometimes we'd have a revival. Pastor would bring the evangelist and say to the evangelist, "There's one now, sic him, get him, get him," and my father would say the same thing. Every time, my mother in the kitchen, always nervous, in fear of flaring tempers, of somebody being hurt. And always my father said, "The church doesn't care about me. The church wants another name and another pledge." I guess I heard it a thousand times.

One time he didn't say it. He was in the veterans' hospital, and he was down to 73 pounds. They'd taken out his throat, and said, "It's too late." They put in a metal tube, and X-rays burned him to pieces. I flew in to see him. He couldn't speak, couldn't eat. I looked around the room, potted plants and cut flowers on all the windowsills, a stack of cards 20 inches deep beside his bed. And even that tray where they put food, if you can eat, on that was a flower. And all the flowers beside the bed, every card, every blossom, were from persons or groups from the church.

He saw me read a card. He could not speak, so he took a Kleenex box and wrote on the side of it a line from Shakespeare. If he had not written this line, I would not tell you this story. He wrote: "In this harsh world, draw your breath in pain to tell my story."

I said, "What is your story, Daddy?"

And he wrote, "I was wrong."

The church is the body of Christ. That church, that congregation, cared for Fred Craddock's, father despite the fact that he rejected them time and time again. God says, 'I raised you up on eagles' wings and you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.'

We are that body of Christ. We are that priestly kingdom and holy nation. We are the body that is called to love and care for each and every one — for those of us who are here this morning; for those of us that aren't. We are here because we are justified by faith. I am here because my loving mother & father, faith-filled parents, brought me to worship, and raised me in faith. We are here, because our loving parent God wants us to be calls us to be, asks us to be here. And in love, and out of faith, God acts, and we respond.

Amen.