

North Kildonan United Church

18th October 2020 ~Rev. Don Johnson

“Food for the Day”

Exodus 33: 12-28

Philippians 4: 1-9

Matthew 22: 15-22

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen. (Psalm 19:14)

For the last several weeks we have been following the account in Exodus of the journey from slavery to freedom of the people of Israel. It has not been an easy journey, nor a short one. At every step of the way the people challenged and complained and argued with Moses. They also disobeyed and tested the patience of God. The lectionary reading for last Sunday, which we did not read because it was Harvest Thanksgiving, tells of the people creating an idol to worship, a Golden Calf.

Moses was on Mount Sinai, communing with God, and the people became impatient because he was away so long. Who had the bright idea to create an idol we do not know, but the people commissioned Aaron to collect all the gold from the people and to create with it a Golden Calf.

While on Mount Sinai, Moses received the two tablets containing the covenant. As Moses came down from the mount, he could hear the people celebrating and worshipping their golden idol. In his rage Moses broke both of the tablets, symbolic of how the people had broken their covenant with God. The text actually says: *"When Moses saw that the people were running wild"*. Pretty vivid language.

Once again, Moses had to act as the intermediary between the Lord God and the people. The anger of God subsides, to the point where God declares: *"I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, "The Lord"; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy"*.

But just before that, Moses had asked to see the face of God. *"Show me your glory, I pray"* says Moses.

God will have none of that. *"You cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live."* Our reading this day concludes: *'See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.'*

What do we make of that? As one commentary puts it: *"Since Moses and others had clearly already seen God, the point is not that it is impossible to see God; rather it*

is that after so great a sin it is gracious and merciful of God to free us from having to look God in the face." As all of us can remember having to face someone we have wronged, it is a painful and humiliating experience. How much more terrifying would it be to come face to face with the Creator of the Universe, the one whom we just disobeyed and sinned against? To spare Moses that experience was indeed gracious and merciful on God's part.

As Christians, we are reminded, we are assured, that our access to the Almighty God is through Jesus Christ...the one who loves us and died for us and lives again for us, the one who receives us just as we are, forgives us not once but always, the one who welcomes us with open, loving arms. So, we can sing with confidence: *"Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me, and that thou bidd'st me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come."* This is of course the same Lamb of God we recall in the Service of Holy Communion, as the chalice of juice, symbolic of Christ's blood, is raised and we sing or say: *"O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us."* So too are we bold to pray to God through Jesus, as we so often conclude our prayers with those well-known words: *"through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

Through Jesus Christ we are able to look God in the face, without fear of condemnation or shame for our actions. *"Just as I am, thy love unknown has broken every barrier down; now to be thine, yea, thine alone, O Lamb of God, I come, I come."* Or as one famous preacher put it, when God looks at us, God sees us through Jesus Christ.

So, without fear or trembling, we can say with St Paul: *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

This is our final Sunday with Exodus. Just before we leave Exodus, I want to share this story with you. It comes from a sermon the Rev George MacLeod, founder of the Iona Community, preached back in 1956.

"A boy of twelve came home enthusiastically from Sunday School.

"Mummy", he said, "we heard a wonderful story today. It was about Moses. You see, the Israelites were captive in Egypt. They decided to get out, so first of all they built up a resistance movement. Then they infiltrated behind the Egyptian lines.

The Jews were organized into commando groups. They broke through and came to the Red Sea. But they could not get across, so they built a Bailey bridge and went over. From the other side they noticed the Egyptians were following in tanks.

So, Moses called up his air force on his walkie-talkie to bomb the bridge. Down went the bridge with the Egyptians on it, into the Red Sea..."

His mother, aghast, interrupted him.

"But is that really what you heard?"

"Yes", said the boy.

"And that was really the way your teacher told you?" asked the mother.

"Oh no," said the boy, "but if I had told you in the way she put it you wouldn't have understood what I was talking about."

Today is marked as World Food Sunday. The actual date for World Food Day is October 16th. It was in 1945 that the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization founded World Food Day and since 1981 it's been observed annually on October 16th. The event was established to increase awareness of world hunger and poverty and to inspire solutions for world change.

Our call to worship and opening prayer reflects the themes of World Food Day.

The World Food Day website offers these insights.

"In recent decades the world has made significant progress in improving agricultural productivity. Although we now produce more than enough food to feed everyone, our food systems are out of balance. Hunger, obesity, environmental degradation, loss of agro-biological diversity, food loss and waste and a lack of security for food chain workers are only some of the issues that underline this imbalance. As countries begin to develop and implement COVID-19 recovery plans, it is an opportunity to adopt innovative solutions based on scientific evidence so they can build back better and improve food systems, making them more resistant to shocks.

World Food Day is calling for global solidarity to help all populations, and especially the most vulnerable, to recover from the crisis, and to make food systems more resilient and robust so they can withstand increasing volatility and climate shocks, deliver affordable and sustainable healthy diets for all, and decent livelihoods for food system workers. This will require improved social protection schemes and new opportunities offered through digitalization and e-commerce, but also more sustainable agricultural practices that preserve the Earth's natural resources, our health and the climate."

The United Church has always been a strong supporter of the work and the goals of World Food Day. Through our contributions to the Mission and Service Fund we offer support to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and to our global partners, as together we work to feed those in need around the world.

Let us conclude with this World Food Day Prayer, written by *Michael Shewburg*.
Let us pray.

Creator of all that is, all that has ever been, and all that will ever come, in the season we know in the North as autumn, we offer gratitude for the cycle of the seasons. In this season we begin to reap what we have sown, tended to, prayed over, and fretted on. In all of this, we know that you have been there, watching over your creation and all its creatures.

We lament over crops that were lost this year, to drought, and hail, and floods, to frost, to lack of workers, to pandemic. We lament over crops that were never planted, where farmers could not access their land or do not have the privilege to acquire land. Help us to stand in solidarity with farmers whose harvest never came to yield; help us to see land not as a resource to use, but as a gift to share.

As the leaves begin to turn brilliant reds, oranges, and yellows, we begin to pull from the ground the fruit of our labour. The potatoes, squash, brussels sprouts, cabbage, apples, pears and more begin to fill our baskets. We give thanks. The corn and beans are ready to be stored; they have dried on their stocks. We know that these foods will sustain us through the winter.

We give thanks for labourers who have come to harvest, workers from near and far, many who travel to this land to find work. Sustainer, open our eyes to their sacrifice and help us to honour their gift. We pray for a safe harvest for all labourers and farmers.

As the honeybee prepares for winter, we enjoy honey's nectar sweetness. As the broiler chicken is fully grown, we give thanks for their life that will sustain us. As the hunter patiently awaits the deer, we honour its gift as nourishment.

Creator, we are called back to remember our interconnectedness during this harvest season. Forgive us the times that we have been disconnected from our relations in our desire to take more than we should. Call us back into the fabric of creation so that we might live in the abundance of life.

For all this, and more, we give thanks.

Amen.

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