

“Anywhere Any Time”
 Exodus 12:1-14
 September 6, 2020
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Are there ever times - - when you wonder if there is anything that could stop God?

If God had some intention for the world - - or for you and me - - could it be stopped?

Could God’s desires for us be stopped by something really BAD?

Could it get to be so chaotic in the world that God just gave up?

Could it become so nice and peaceful that God just stopped and took a rest?

Could some mean nasty powerful person outmaneuver God?

This morning’s scripture reading has an answer to these questions.

And that answer - - is “No”.

This reading from the book of Exodus shows us that God will be God, anywhere and any time. / God will do what God will do. / And yet - - very often - - the WAY God does things is NOT what we expected - - NOR is the WAY necessarily always God’s FIRST choice.

God chooses a way - - and shows us a way - - in spite of the circumstances.

God’s first choice was a garden in Eden.

God’s first choice was for Pharaoh to let the Hebrew people go free.

But a snake offered an apple in the garden - - and Pharaoh said “NO” - - 9 times.

Moses and Aaron ask Pharaoh to free the Hebrew people.

Over and over they ask.

Over and over he says “no”.

And over and over - - this results in another plague and more misery.

But in the end - - the people do go free.

It all gets me wondering about - - choices.

Before I make a choice, I like to have good information. / My assumption is that the MORE I KNOW about something - - the less chance there will be - - that I will do - - what looks like a RANDOM act. / Instead I try to make a CLEAR CHOICE. / And so, of course, I hope to make the BEST choice. / I try to choose what is BEST.

That is what I LIKE to do - - but it is not always the way life works out.

Once in a while I am in a HURRY. / Or I get lazy. / Or I am pressured.

Life turns out to get difficult.

There is a crisis - - or a sickness - - or a virus - - or some resistance from someone.

And then maybe I choose too quickly.

I make decisions pretty quickly anyway - - most of the time - - and I like to think I do a fairly good job - - and am usually clear in my decisiveness. / But isn't always easy.

Do you know what I mean?

I remember once - - choosing an ALTERNATOR for my car - - - in a kind of random way. / An alternator is the kind of thing - you DON'T usually shop around for - - anyway. Your car breaks down and then you are under pressure. / Right?

So - - the FIRST - - - in a SERIES of alternators - - I purchased in a SMALL Indiana town - - with only ONE service station. / They KNEW my car wasn't going any further.

I was in kind of a spot. / Not much of a choice.

And - - it wasn't much of an alternator they sold me.

And it cost too much.

But what could I do?

This morning's reading from the Old Testament book of EXODUS is also about a CHOICE that God made. / A choice to free the Hebrew people.

This reading is the BEGINNING of the long story of the escape from Egypt - - the beginning of the story of a CHOSEN people - - who EXITED from Egypt. The Exodus.

The story will continue through our readings for the next few weeks.

In the reading for today from chapter 12 - - we are at the PIVOTAL moment.

This is the account of the Passover meal.

This morning's reading from the book of Exodus is the account of the first Passover.

During the last and final plague that God sent Egypt - - to help free the Israelites - - and the killing of the firstborn - - the Israelites were told to put the blood of the lamb on their doorposts.

This is part of a feast - - which is at the heart of what happens.

The feast of the Passover.

It is a feast that is prepared quickly - - because they are in crisis.

They are told to eat it with their travelling clothes on - - ready to go.

It doesn't seem like - - the way a person would FIRST choose to eat a feast.

To eat a feast in this way - - would not be the FIRST choice - - of most people.

AND - - it was NOT Moses' first choice.

And it was NOT God's first choice.

This was the 10th time Pharaoh had been asked to free the Hebrews.

Not the first.

And along with the request for freedom - - came a plague - - after the answer was NO.

And - - along with the request for freedom - - and a plague - - came a desire for a feast.

Isn't that AMAZING!

If you asked what this whole plague thing was all about - - the answer would be:

a feast

Over and over - - Moses says that what they want - - is to go into the wilderness - - and worship and sacrifice to their God. / The REASON for their freedom - - was to connect with their God - - in the way they wanted.

What they wanted was a feast - - all along.

They tell Pharaoh this in chapter 5 of Exodus.

And again on chapter 8...

And again in chapter 10...

Pharaoh even almost lets them go - - but then changes his mind.

What they WANT - - is to feast and sacrifice to God in the wilderness - - away from the Egyptian influence - - and to honor their God.

God wants the people to do this too - - as a way of connecting to the covenant they have.

They understand themselves to be God's chosen - - beloved people.

And all they want is to feast and to sacrifice - - as such.

And in the end - - after the 10th plague - - that IS what happens.

The feast and sacrifice - - however - - was NOT in the wilderness.

And it was prepared in haste.

And it was called the Passover.

This feast was God's way of saying:

I will be with you - - anywhere - - any time - - no matter what.

I am God - - and I will not be stopped.

No violent oppressive power will stop God.

No corrupt political leader will stop God.

No army will stop God.

But - - this plague of DEATH - - was not God's FIRST choice.

This was NOT the way God FIRST proposed doing this.

And what about Pharaoh's choice?

Pharaoh choose NOT to do what God asked.

Pharaoh had a hardened heart we are told.

And what about the choices of the Hebrew people?

They do hold the feast and follow Moses.

But they doubt - - and complain - - and fear - - all they way too.

So what does it really mean - - to be CHOSEN by God?

And what does it mean - - for us - - to CHOOSE God?

As you think about that - - I'll tell you a story...

When my friend Charles was a little kid, he wanted something called a "Vac-U-Form" machine for Christmas. / It is a sort-of TOY - - that comes with SHEETS OF PLASTIC which the machine HEATS up, and then ANY object of your choice can be placed UNDER THE PLASTIC, and the machine SUCKS the plastic down over the object to create plastic posters - or plaques. / Charles told me - his mom thought it was a WIERD toy.

And she was hesitant to get him something with which he could laminate silverware, or her jewelry. / But he REALLY wanted it - - and kept asking for it.

Charles didn't totally expect to get it, and geared up for disappointment.

But then - - when nearly all the gifts were opened - - Charles opened a small package - - - of the plastic replacement sheets - - for the vac-u-form set.

He couldn't believe he would really get it !

He looked all over for the package containing the actual machine. / But he didn't see it anywhere. / And he realized there had been a mistake.

His mother had wandered through stores - - and seen the words "vac-u-form" on a package and bought it. / She had had NO IDEA what he really wanted - - she had not gotten all the information - - on this complex choice - - and she had made a kind of random choice. / She had bought the replacement sheets ONLY - and not the machine.

Oh well. She HAD tried.

But what good is someone who is well intentioned - - - but uninformed?

And - - there are other choices in life - - that are more important.

Our choices matter.

We have a God who is SO GENEROUS.

And a God who desires GOOD for us.

A God who wants - - a FEAST.

God chooses a way - - and shows us a way - - in spite of the circumstances.

This morning's reading from EXODUS is about a CHOICE that God made - - to set people free. / A choice to stick with a struggling band of people who had been enslaved by a corrupt government - - which had kept them poor and in bondage.

And - - if God were going to choose a people - - I'm not sure that Israel would be considered the best choice. / If you picked at random, I'm not sure you could get a weaker deal!

This is a small, weak nation, completely enslaved by another kingdom.

But in the very same way that children often pick the RUNT of the litter to love - - God picks up Israel and loves her. / AND - it is a completely - - INFORMED choice.

God KNOWS Israel's weakness.

And God knows OUR weakness.

And we are chosen anyway.

And - - no - - it's not FAIR.

But thank God.

Or where would we be?

This morning's reading from the book of Exodus is the account of the first Passover. /

During the last and final plague that God sent Egypt. –

The Israelites were told to put the blood of the lamb on their doorposts.

I once thought that this was to tell the angel of death where to pass over.

But look at what God says to Moses: God says, "the blood shall be a sign FOR YOU."

The mark on the doorposts was a sign for THE HEBREW PEOPLE.

The angel of death ALREADY KNEW where to go.

God didn't need a sign.

The sign was for them.

The signs are for US.

I am reminded of road signs in Michigan which tell the names of the towns. They ALSO tell you - - - what years their high school teams have been state basketball, or track champs.

As I drove through Michigan once - - I wondered - - who the signs were FOR.

Were they for ME? / Were they for the random passing motorist?

I didn't really care about their high school basketball team.

Maybe - - the signs were for the people who lived in the towns too.

To show their pride.

To remind them who they were.

There ARE signs like that in our lives.

No matter HOW random or chaotic life seems.

No matter how unfair.

We ARE loved by God.

And whether it is the morning sunrise that reminds you...

Or a phone call from a friend...

Or a question asked by a child...

Listen up!

God's love is there - - for US.

And the BEAUTY of it is - - -

- - - that even after God has gotten all the facts on each one of us - - like a well informed shopper - - and when God knows all there is about us - - both the good and the bad - - God acts - - clearly - - and decisively - - and chooses to love us - - and gives us the sign of the CROSS - - to remind us who we are.

God chooses a way - - and shows us a way - - in spite of the circumstances.

There is nothing that can stop that.

God will be there - - one way or the other: anywhere... any time.

Imagine a table - - in the presence of enemies...

Imagine a feast - - even in the midst of Covid and chaos...

Can we choose to feast - - even during difficult times?

The message of the Passover is - - yes we can!

Anywhere. Any time.