

November 10, 2019

Sermon Title: Who are We? | First in a Series of Two on “Life Together”

Texts - Exodus 3:1-15 and II Thessalonians 2:1-8

Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin

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And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. 10 Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” 11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” 12 He said, “But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

Last week, our sermon came to an end with the invitation for us to seek to be famous here at St. Paul Lutheran for confessing our sins and our faults and our failures first of all to God and secondly to one another. The incredibly good news about doing that is that as often as we admit that we daily fall short of God’s standards of perfection, that often the grace of God has a chance to sweep over our souls and be in charge around her. As often as a single sinner repents, the Bible says that all of heaven breaks out in rejoicing. Imagine that joy when dozens and even hundreds of sinners admit that we are in fact poor and miserable and struggling people who need help from above.

Today we begin a two part series of sermons on our “Life Together” here at St Paul Lutheran. Both sermons are based on the appointed Old Testament lessons. Next Sunday, we ask with the prophet Malachi “Why be Afraid?” Today we ask with Moses, “Who Are We?” Two lessons we want to learn again today about what it means to be the people of God, two lessons we want to learn about what it means to be saved by the grace of God alone through faith in Jesus Christ alone - and yet remembering that faith in Jesus Christ never comes alone, it always comes with good works ordained by God and prepared in advance for us to do.

Lesson #1 we get from Exodus 3, and it is that Oppressed people are in need of (a Rescuer)

I haven’t seen the movie “Harriet”, but a friend who has seen it tells me it is as inspiring as a movie can be. Harriet Tubman was born in 1822 into slavery. She suffered greatly as a child. As were so many of her race for decades and even centuries, she was beaten and whipped by her various masters. According to Wikopedia, she escaped to Philadelphia at age 26 and immediately returned to rescue her family. Traveling by night and in extreme secrecy, she guided dozens of her enslaved and beaten down family members and others to freedom.

When the Civil War began, Harriet worked for the Union Army, first as a cook and a nurse, and eventually as an armed scout and spy. As a result of one particular raid, more than 700

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slaves were liberated. Hundreds of thousands of oppressed and suffering black Americans were in need of a rescuer, and for more than a few, Harriet Tubman was that person. Praise be to God!

In Exodus chapter 3, the people of Israel, perhaps a million or so, needed a “Rescuer,” and Moses was God’s chosen person. Praise be to God! In Exodus 3, God appears to Moses who was spending 40 years out in the wilderness shepherding the flocks of his father in law. He appeared not in usual fashion, but in the midst of a bush that was on fire but wasn’t burning. The Lord God Almighty made it clear to Moses that he had seen the misery of His people in Egypt, he was concerned with their suffering, and he had come down to do something about it.

These folks needed a rescuer, they needed a deliverer, they need a savior with a small s, and Moses was that person. Praise be to God!

Lesson #1 today is that oppressed people in every generation and in every locality are in need of a rescuer. For many black Americans, that person was Harriet Tubman. For the nation of Israel who had been in bondage for 430 years, that man was Moses. For the people of St. Paul Lutheran and the people of Waseca County and the people into the far corners of the world, that man who also happens to be true God is Jesus Christ.

According to our sinful nature, all of us are in need of a “Rescuer.” Every day we fall far short of God’s standards of perfection, and it is simply impossible for us to lift ourselves up by the bootstraps, spiritually speaking. The folks here in Waseca are no different than the people of Janesville, you are no different than the folks in small towns and large cities to the ends of the earth. We sin daily by the bad that we do and the good we fail to do. Much of our suffering is self inflicted, some of our suffering is the result of others oppressing us, some of our suffering is through no fault of our own or others, it’s just the price we pay for being part of a messed up world full of messed up people.

Praise be to God for sending His one and only Son to be our Savior. He lived the perfect life we could never begin to live. He suffered all that He was appointed to suffer. As you well know, He was crucified until He was dead and buried on a Friday, only to rise up in glorious fashion on Easter Sunday morning. By suffering, dying, and rising up again, as you well know, Jesus Christ paid the price we could never begin to pay with our good behavior, he cancelled the debt we could never begin to even make payments on, he appeased the wrath of a righteous God we could never hope to appease. In the waters of Baptism, your names were written in the book of life. Your mansions in heaven are on reserve. You are free to live as the rescued, the delivered, the precious, the redeemed, the forgiven, the set free people of the the Triune God. And the news gets even better

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Lesson #2 we get mainly from II Thessalonians 2, and it is that the Rescued people of God are not (easily alarmed)

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ²not to be quickly shaken in mind or ⁴alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

One of the beautiful blessings of living as the people of God is that we know where is our refuge and strength. It is in our Lord Jesus Christ, it's in His Word which is inspired by God and without error, it is in His Church which is His very body. I invite you to think with me today about what it means that we are the people of God who are not easily alarmed. That we would not be easily unsettled or tossed to and fro by the winds of doctrine that blow our way.

In Paul's day, there was a rumor that the second coming of Christ had already arrived. In response to that rumor, St. Paul launched into a lengthy prophecy about the two events that would have to take place before Jesus would come back again. First, there would need to be a falling away or a massive denial that Jesus was in fact their Savior. And secondly, the man of lawlessness would need to show up, also called the son of perdition or the Antichrist, capital A. There's a lot we could say about the Antichrist, but for today, two key points will suffice. #1 - The Antichrist will be a religious teacher who claims to be doing the work of Christ, but actually is in opposition to Him. And #2 - the span of time of the Antichrist would stretch from Paul's time to the end of the world. The Antichrist would exalt himself in the place of Jesus and would be successful in turning many away from Jesus as Savior.

The Good News again today is that because of all that Jesus Christ has done, you and I are able to be still and know that God is God. The question of the day is simply “who are we?” And the answer is that we are the treasured and the precious and the purchased people of God who are not easily alarmed.

The stories in closing:

- The story of a Janesville couple, about my age, whose son Nathan died in a horrific car accident, age 18, Friday the 13th of Dec. 1996. Memory of dr. coming in, telling these people of God their son would not live, and within a few minutes, this mom making a statement of faith along the lines of “God must have His reasons. (The rescued people of God are not easily alarmed)
- The story of 600 or 700 or so gravesite services I have attended over the past 39 years, where the closing words are the words of the suffering and oppressed Job, “I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. Ad after my

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skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see him, and not another.” (The rescued people of God are not easily alarmed.)

- The story of a young friend of mine, age 16 or so, recently gave birth to a child out of wedlock, no job, no income to speak of, family support is not nearly what it needs to be, boy friend recently abandoned her, her needs include in these days a stroller, a car seat approved by the state of Minnesota, not to mention the basic needs of life. She needs a rescuer, and in her case, her rescuer is fellow church members, her rescuer is a local Lutherans for Life chapter, her rescuer is a few people of God in her family circle and in her local congregation who are social media and in person representing Jesus Christ to her.

The kingdom of God is like a medium size congregation in a medium size city who has been rescued by Jesus Christ Himself. His grace and His mercy have been delivered into their very hearts and souls in the waters of Baptism, in the preaching and teaching of His Word, and in their regular eating and drinking at their Lord’s Table. So much about their future they have no idea how it will turn out, but this they know for certain. They know that God has seen their suffering and their brokenness and that He has come down in the Person and in the work of Jesus Christ, and He has rescued them. They know that their main problem in life has been solved, their chief question has been answered, their souls have been saved, their sins have been forgiven, their destiny is paradise, and therefore they are not easily alarmed. They spend their days looking for people in trouble that need their help, they leave the house of God week after week looking for opportunities to serve, they understand that the end times are going to be full of trouble, they live in their life together knowing who they are and for what purposes they have been called.