

#41 10-11

Urgency for Justice

Psalms 149

Romans 13:8-14

Matthew 18:15-20

Exodus 12:1-14

1The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: 2This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. 3Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. 4If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. 5Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. 7They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. 8They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 9Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. 10You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. 11This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord. 12For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. 13The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. 14This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

We have today – on the 12th Sunday after Pentecost – the 41st week in a 52 week church year – today we have the scripture pertaining to Passover. If my memory doesn't fail me – I just preached on this last Maundy Thursday at the ecumenical service at the Methodist church!

Now, I don't have any idea how "they" determine what the Lectionary will be for the 3 year cycle – so I *shouldn't* make any guesses as to how this pops up here - *in this time of year* – but I will anyway!

We are just ending the summer days which weren't necessarily slow – but in general, they aren't as structured as the rest of the year. Now is the time we are getting back to school and starting up programs in the church and thinking ahead to fall and winter approaching. Now we need to get a bit more revved up – a bit less complacent – focusing on tasks ahead.

Those who planted vegetable gardens are busy harvesting and canning. We still have the grill out and ready to use – but we are slowly beginning to realize that these days are shortening and soon we will have to pack our summer stuff away. There is a bit less of the laid back summer – and the sense of urgency is creeping up on us.

So in this reading, they were to eat unleavened bread and eat it all hurriedly, which begs the question: the Israelites had been enslaved for over 200 years – why the sense of urgency now?

Besides that – from our Epistle reading we heard, "11Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep." And our Gospel was Jesus instructing his followers on how to deal with each other when there is a problem. He gives step after step – encouraging the one who has been harmed not to give up on justice, and to involve others in the pursuit of justice as well, if one cannot accomplish it alone.

Suddenly it seems there is a sense of urgency for justice in the readings this week.

Rabbi Jeff Kirshblum wrote that the great Kabbalist, Ari Hakodesh, "pointed out that the Israelites were held captive by a society that was steeped in degenerate immorality and deceptive idolatry. With each passing decade, the negative effects of Egyptian culture were being transposed to the Israelites . . . That was the great lesson of requiring the Jews to smear the blood of the Paschal sacrifice on the doorposts of the Jewish homes. The Jews, in a fleeting moment of haughtiness, must

have thought that there were great differences and distinctions between them and their lowly Egyptian neighbors. G-d told them that they must mark their doorposts because that was the only way one could distinguish between Jew and Egyptian.”

Furthermore, he wrote, “We can see that between holiness and impurity, between eternity and spiritual oblivion, there *can* be a span of only a minute or two. The whole difference between chametz-annihilation, and matzah-salvation, was only 18 minutes. The strict laws pertaining to the mitzvah [commandment] of chametz teach us quite a bit about life. How often does a mitzvah present itself, yet if we wait a second or two the opportunity can be lost forever. The mitzvah of chametz instructs us to seize every opportunity swiftly.”

And what, exactly, are the urgent opportunities we are to seize? Not just following the laws of the Torah – but to regain a sense of who we are as God’s children – together. The mark of the Passover lamb was one way to distinguish them from others – and yet – there is another – and it is right at the beginning of the scripture for today. “3Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. 4If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it.”

Rabbi Kirschblum explained in his article about the Pesach, “The Torah tells us that if a family has too few members to eat the entire Paschal lamb, they should find a neighbor to join their Seder to help them finish the meal. Obviously such a neighbor must be someone who does not have his own Paschal lamb. Possibly it is someone who is poor and cannot afford one or it is someone who lives alone and can not consume an entire lamb. If so, why didn’t the Torah write “If you do not have a Paschal lamb, find a family who has an extra portion and join with them.” Why did the Torah place the onus on the one who has the extra portion and not on the one who needs it?

The Torah teaches us a most valuable Jewish lesson. [God] chose to put the obligation on the giver rather than the receiver. [God] commanded the people to open their homes to the lonely, the poor and the needy. The people of means should not partake of their Pesach Seder until they have seen to it that their underprivileged neighbors are included.

[W]ith all the emphasis the Torah puts on the family unit, it makes certain that no one is alone. Compassion for the poor and lonely is also part of the education that we must teach our children. Parents are to serve as role models for their children, so that the next generation will emulate them. [The] consecration of the Jewish home is not [founded on] the brick and mortar, but the essential Jewish values of compassion and charity.”

So often for children and those families that have children in school it seems like the New Year does not begin on January 1st as in the Roman calendar year – or even on the first Sunday of Advent as in the church year – the beginning is usually around this time of year – September. And the scripture seems to be calling for us to be urgent for justice – for compassion and charity. It can be daunting – but we also need not forget this wonderful little part at the end of our scripture for today – “on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord.”

So we need not worry about the big word JUSTICE, all we need to do is to be ready to practice mercy as often as we can, and yet at the same time give the weight and the pain and the execution of judgment to God. The texts for today show us how this can be done – through the sense of community! The Israelites were bound together through the paschal lamb – the Romans were told by Paul to start off dealing with justice on a one to one basis – but to engage others if necessary – and Jesus promised his followers: “18Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

I would be remiss if I were not to mention that this is Labor Day weekend. “The first big Labor Day in the United States was observed on September 5, 1882, by the Central Labor Union of New York. It became a federal holiday in 1894, when, following the deaths of a number of workers at the hands of the U.S. military and U.S. Marshals during the Pullman Strike, President Grover Cleveland reconciled with the labor movement. Fearing further conflict, legislation making Labor Day a national holiday was rushed through Congress unanimously and signed into law a mere six days after the end of the strike.” [Wikipedia] So – that being said – it certain seems like the history of this day was seen as an Urgency for Justice! So enjoy this weekend, and practice an urgent mercy! AMEN