



September 6th, 2020

14th Sunday after Pentecost

The Rev. Anthony Estes, Associate Rector

First Reading: Exodus 12:1-14

Second Reading: Romans 13: 8-14

The Gospel: Matthew 18: 15-20

It seems like it was just yesterday when I first entered this place, this building. I'm standing in Trinity Episcopal Church on the corner of Martin Luther Junior King Boulevard and Trumbull.

And I started here as a missioner, a deacon, and discovered here a place full of wonder and discovered a history, a shared ministry between the people of this congregation, of this neighborhood and community with my new family, my new friends at Christ Church Detroit.

And shortly before the pandemic began, I stood in this very room, speaking to about 10 people who had gathered for worship to let them know that this mission was closing —not God's mission — but this particular instance of it was coming to an end.

I stood in this room and told those people to take a breath...to remember that God's plan was so much bigger than a building, that God had a plan for us. And so they needed to stay alive, spiritually, to be ready for whatever would come next.

In the Book of Exodus, we find the Children of Israel in Goshen. They have witnessed nine plagues (the scripture calls them *signs* and *wonders*) that have been performed in Egypt though Moses, God's agent.

God has been directly challenging the impressions and the inclinations of the people of Egypt. God has been working out God's plan to save God's people, to save his people — not from sin, *per se* — but from oppression, an oppressive tyrant that the Children of God have been crying out about.

And on the eve of the 10th plague, which turns out to be a rebound of the Pharaoh's first thought — to kill the first-born sons of the nation of Israel, the Children of Israel — this was a rebound that all of the first-born sons of Egypt would die.

We understand that although this story is incredible, unbelievable, I think one of the messages we can take from this is that when there is oppression and God is acting against it, God is not willing to let it stand unchecked, it is final. It is decisive.

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So that Children of Israel are in Goshen, and God tells them, "*This is the first day of a new year. Eat this meal, dressed and ready to go into the promised land. Mark the door of your house with the blood of this sacrificed lamb and everything going on in the world around you will pass over.*"

What was it like in those houses that evening?

I imagine it is a little bit like how I feel standing here now. Next Sunday, the last worship service will be held in this building and our bishop, Bishop Perry, will de-consecrate it.

And it feels scary. And, as you can see, I'm dressed ready to move on to what is next. And in a lot of ways, I already have. I have become your Associate Rector, and I am getting to know you and you're getting to know me.

The point is, that on the eve of something so scary, so terrible, it is also the eve of something so great and something so profound.

It is a stretch and an invitation for our faith to believe that what might be the worst thing that has ever happened to you and those around you, God can use and turn it into the very best thing that has ever happened to you and those around you.

And so, there is much sadness in the world. And, yes, as I stand here, I am sad. But I am also so grateful for the opportunity to continue to walk in God's promises with you...at Christ Church Detroit. And I am so honored to have you walk with me.

I'm deciding to live.

Every day *you* are deciding to live in the hope and the promise that the God who hears the cries and the suffering that that God will act...decisively and finally. We choose to believe that that God has acted in Jesus. We have been saved from the tyrant...that is sin, that is death, that is hatred, that is (as Paul has talks about) the lusts of our own flesh.

Every day we have to choose hope. We have to choose, as Paul talks about in Romans, this new law, the law of love...owing nothing to anyone but love. It's the kind of love that we have to exercise.

In the Gospel, Jesus talks, "*Hey, if you have a problem with your brother, you go to him and him alone, and you work it out.*"

It's not private hurt, but I reach out to correct, to speak truth, to power, not because of vindication but because I want to be reconciled. I want to gain my sister, my brother.

It may be the eve of great destruction, and I think we all do ourselves a disservice to act like things aren't as bad as they seem. They are bad. But it is also the eve of hope.

We are, after all, Christians. We are, after all, third-day people. We understand that one night can turn into two nights, but on that third day, the Son of God that oppressors killed comes back to life. The Father glorifies him. We believe that he is ascended into heaven and has sent his Holy Spirit to be in us and around us today.

It is an evening for hope. And so though I know it's Sunday morning, I say:

"Good...night."