

The Reverend Renee L. Fenner
St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
16th Sunday after Pentecost/Proper 20/Year A
September 24, 2017
Text: Exodus 16:2-15

Over the last several weeks we have been hearing the story of the Hebrew people and how they entered and exited Egypt. We heard how Joseph, the beloved son of Jacob, found favor with Pharaoh during a time of famine and how Joseph and his people were welcomed into a new land. But then came a time when there arose a new king who did not know Joseph. The new king of Egypt grew intimidated and fearful of the people who lived in his land so in his fear he directed his people to oppress the Hebrews making them slaves and weighing them down with hard labor. He made their lives miserable. And as if that were not enough to destroy them, he ordered the murder of all their newborn males. For years and years God's children suffered and for years and years they cried out to God to release them from the tyranny of Egypt. The one day God called out to the male child whose life was spared from the waters of the Nile.

The adult, Moses, heard the voice of God in the burning bush and he was dispatched to go and confront Pharaoh. His message to Pharaoh was 'Let God's people go.' Old Pharaoh was reluctant yet God was more persistent. Pharaoh did let God's people go after a series of plagues. The Hebrew people had their freedom at last but it wasn't an easy journey to the Land of Milk and Honey because their freedom led them directly into the wilderness and Pharaoh changed his mind. Moses and the Israelites had a head start yet Pharaoh and his army went after them to bring them back to lives of slavery. But once more God intervened and the people found themselves escaping Pharaoh's grasp by the parting of the sea. Pharaoh's army did not see another day. And so it was that the Israelites were saved and they celebrated and played their tambourines. They sang and they danced and rejoiced for God had delivered them once again. Those many years of slavery became a memory.

Still, the most amazing thing began to happen. There is something in this Exodus story that makes us cock our heads to one side and then shake them in disbelief. For some things never change. Do they? Maybe it is our human nature. Their shouts of joy, their celebration of freedom seemed to dampen and fizzle as they begin to moan and groan about how rough life had become. The Children of Israel kept looking back instead of forward. They began to hallucinate about 'the

good ole days.’ Days of eating fish, “the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic” (Num. 11:5) before Pharaoh had them eating dirt and cowering under his whip. They had forgotten about the freedom that was now theirs. They often were not satisfied with the manna and quail that God provided. They had forgotten God’s promise and the need to look forward. They began to complain to Moses and Aaron. If it wasn’t about food, it was about water. If it wasn’t about water, it was about food. *“If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”* How much longer to the Promised Land? A little of that milk and honey would be nice right about now. Are we there yet? Huh? Huh? Are we there yet?

They got exactly what they asked for- freedom, food, and water but still they complained. But isn’t that just like us? We wish, we pray, we struggle, we beg, we moan and groan, and then once we have it, we complain and yearn for more. And more. And still more!

We dream of the greener grass on the other side. We want what our neighbor has and our neighbor wants what we have. We are on a continuous cycle of wanting more. The more the better. The bigger the better. We put our trust in God and then take back some of that trust when we can’t see our way. We settle on remembering ‘the good ole days’-which is not bad-but we hesitate imaging anything good coming towards us in the future. We read the story of the Israelites and chide them for their lack of faith yet forget the times when we walk the journeys of our lives with hesitancy and fear and we fail to see what God provides every single day. We can say they were not grateful for what God provided yet we are apt to do the same. We are often ungrateful. We spend time in both the wilderness and in the land promised us just like the Children of Israel. We sometimes lack an ‘attitude of gratitude.’

For some of us, gratitude is second nature, but for many of us, we have to work at it, naming the things we are grateful for in our prayers at the beginning and ending of each new day. Some of us take on practices of gratitude by paying a kind deed forward. In my own life, practicing an ‘attitude of gratitude’ turns a moment of despair into joy for what was and is and can be.

Every week we gather for Eucharist. This is what we do and it is the center of who we are as a community. Did you know that the Greek word for thanksgiving is Eucharist? The central act of our worship is a prayer of thanksgiving-we thank God for all that God has done for us since the moment of

creation until this time, this moment. We thank God for God's never failing presence throughout all of history, for prophets, deliverance, and covenants. And most importantly for the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ. We thank God for bread and wine that will be for us the precious Body and Blood of Christ that feeds us and strengthens us to do God's work. We thank God for the community of faith gathered here and now, for the generations of believers who model and continue to model what it means to walk by faith and not by sight. We thank God for the forgiveness we are given and for God's gifts of unfailing love, mercy, grace, and peace that showers down upon each and every one of us. We thank God for each new day that comes and for the abundance of gifts that we are given.

And we look toward the future with God at the helm.

At the end of the day, when it is all said and done, look toward the possibilities of a new day and give thanks to God who makes good on his promises for he is able to make a way out of no way!

Amen.