

6.14.20 L11P2 You are My Treasure

- This morning we have a wonderful scripture reading from the book of Exodus
 - But let me remind you of some of the important things that happened just before this passage of scripture
 - The Israelites, the descendants of Abraham and Sarah were God's chosen people, but they were harshly enslaved in Egypt
 - Hearing the cries of their suffering, God chose an unlikely man named Moses to confront the Pharaoh, the ruler Egypt, to demand that God's people be set free from slavery, to demonstrate God's signs and wonders to Pharaoh through a series of plagues, and finally to punish and defeat Pharaoh and their Egyptian oppressors
 - But Pharaoh was so stubbornly holding onto the Israelites in bondage to slavery, that God finally sent the angel of death to Egypt, where during the night it went throughout the land killing the first-born children of Egypt, but mercifully and graciously passing over and sparing the children of Israel
 - So finally, after years of suffering in slavery by the Israelites, and after suffering and death among the Egyptians, God's chosen people were set free
 - They left Egypt, but the Pharaoh changed his mind and sent his army in pursuit to round them up again, but there trapped between the advancing Egyptian army and the Red Sea, God opened a pathway in the waters for Israelites to escape – but then when the Pharaoh's army tried to follow, the waters closed, they were swallowed up in the sea, and Pharaoh was finally and utterly defeated
 - After all that magnificent work of God to set his beloved people free, they journeyed into the wilderness
 - And there in the wilderness, the chosen people promptly forgot God's love, and they complained, and complained, and complained
 - They stopped in the wilderness, at an oasis, but the water was bitter, so they

murmured and complained to Moses and against God, so God told Moses to chop down a tree and throw it in the water... and the water became sweet

- They went a little farther and they stopped again, but this time God's beloved people were hungry, and they even wanted to go back to slavery in Egypt where they imagined that they had been well-fed by their enslavers... so God sent them manna and quails so that they might have bread and meat to eat
- And they went still farther into the wilderness, and they were thirsty so they murmured and complained again to Moses and against God, and this time God made water gush out of a dry, barren rock
- Then the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness to the foot of Mount Sinai.
 - There Moses went alone up the mountain, and this is what God told Moses to say to his chosen people: "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: ⁴You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, ⁶but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation."
 - After complaining, and complaining, and complaining... after acting like anything BUT the chosen people, God STILL declared despite all that they had done wrong, that they would be *God's treasured possession... and that they would be a priestly kingdom, and a holy nation!*
 - What an amazing declaration of God's love and grace to an underserving but still chosen people!
- God's promises are eternal, so the descendants of Abraham and Sarah are STILL God's precious treasure, but by the grace of God poured out in Jesus Christ – God in

the flesh, crucified and raised – by the grace and love of God shown in Jesus Christ we have also been called to be part of God’s chosen people

- Jesus shared the Good News of the Kingdom with all kinds of people, he invited disciples, he healed the sick, he welcomed the poor, he ate with sinners, and then after the cross, the Risen Christ sent the disciples empowered by the Holy Spirit to go forth to **every** nation and baptize, and through that call, God has claimed us
- By the grace of God alone, we too have become God’s precious treasure, we too have become a priestly kingdom, and we too have become a holy nation – a nation NOT of a country, but a “NATION” living in the world that is the church the body of Christ
- And lest we think that we are any better, or any more faithful than the people wandering in the wilderness and complaining even though both we and they have been set free from slavery not just to Egypt, but set free from sin and death, we complain... we turn away from God... and we do not always love our neighbors
 - Not just a bunch of cranky people, but many people who know Jesus rebel against wearing masks as if their own person freedom is more important than the health and life of their neighbors
 - Not just a bunch of noisy outspoken bigots, but good people who love Jesus – people including us – have racial baggage that we have own up to, and attitudes that need to change
 - Not just a bunch of wayward people long ago in the wilderness who forgot what God had done for them, we too often live as if God needs to prove God’s love for us again and again, when in fact... Jesus Christ has ALREADY died and been raised for us
- And still, despite ourselves, God is crazy enough to continue to say to us, *you are my precious treasure, you are part of my priestly kingdom, you are a part of a beloved holy people.*

- The other day, Mary and I watched the movie “Just Mercy” on television, and it’s being offering free right now on most streaming services and I certainly recommend it.
- “Just Mercy” is a movie about a Black Harvard trained lawyer who had grown up poor, but who then moved to Alabama to provide legal counsel to poor White and Black folks who didn’t have money for a lawyer, when the legal system was sometimes, or even often stacked against them
 - We had seen it when it was in the movie theaters, and before that, we had heard the real person, Bryan Stevenson speak powerfully and faithfully to the young people at the 2018 Lutheran Youth Gathering in Houston, Texas
 - But you see Bryan Stevenson is not only a lawyer – he sees his very life as deeply shaped by Jesus Christ and the church
 - Finding innocent people among the convicted, protecting children cruelly imprisoned with adults, and yes, working for appropriate rather than overly harsh sentences for the guilty, Stevenson says: “each person... is more than the worst things that they’ve ever done.”
 - “Each person... is more than the worst things that they’ve ever done.”
- That. THAT! That is a reflection of what it means to be God precious treasure. We are more than our worst moments... we are God’s precious children
- Despite complaining in the wilderness, despite the moments when we neither love God nor our neighbor, despite the sin that continues to scar our lives and words and actions, despite all that, God has chosen us... Christ has welcomed us... and the Holy Spirit has called us to be part of God’s precious treasure
- So rather than trying to be good and do good to EARN God’s love, out of thanksgiving, out of gratefulness, out of lives that are being changed by God claiming both us AND other people as precious treasure, we seek to love God, and seek to treat our neighbors as precious as well