

Sermon – 09/13/20
Ex 14:19-31; Ex 15:1b-11, 20-21; Ro 14:1-12;
Mt 18:21-35 – God’s Majesty

The great narrative of Exodus is about God’s immense power. This angel of the Lord who watches over and guides the children of Israel appears as a huge weather phenomenon. We must think big. Think what a huge weather machine the earth is. We have stunning evidence in the recent hurricanes, floods, fires and earthquakes in our world. This is only part of God’s created universe. A pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud or vapor led the people. This was divinely – not locally generated.

This is more than a landmark, or GPS guidance. Just imagine divine direction right outside your tent. I used a city map to get around Albuquerque NM when I first made my home there. You may know that the Manzano Mts. are on the east edge of the city. They could be seen night or day. “Ah, there’s the mountain,” I would say to myself. “That’s east. I’m alright now.” I knew which way to go. The pillar of fire and cloud surely gave the Israelites more comfort as they made their way through the Sinai. Of course, they wandered for forty years. This was more about their following than about God’s leading, I think.

Our amazing story from Exodus describes the day the people of God crossed the Red Sea. What a great and glorious day it was! The angel of the Lord guiding the people out of Egypt moved from the head of the nation to the rear.

Pharaoh and his army were coming for the Hebrews. The king had blood in his eye. Like a mother lion, the angel got between the people and the attackers. Morning and night, by the pillars of fire and cloud, God was holding the army hostage. They were in trouble and confusion. Meanwhile, the Almighty spoke to Moses and told him to stretch out his staff over the sea and divide it. And the people walked on dry ground across the sea. What a day for Israel! On the other side of the sea, they sang and danced and praised God with all their might. Their song is the canticle we read together a few minutes ago: “Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, doing wonders?” (Ex 15:11) Think big when you consider the omnipotent, omniscient, eternal God!

In our Gospel reading, we have sat in as Jesus teaches the disciples. Last week we majored on prayer. This week we see the Apostle Peter asking Jesus, “...how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” (v 21)

Then, Jesus says it should be many more times than that. Rather, “forgive seventy-seven times,” says the Lord. Some translations read seventy times seven (490) times.

Jesus’ parable compares the kingdom of heaven to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. After some figuring, a slave who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. A talent is a measure of weight – usually in silver. The Roman talent of the time was 32.3 kg. That is 71.6 pounds of silver. In the day, people were paid in coins stamped in precious metal. If you worked a fair day – morning to evening – you would earn about a denarius. That is 1/100th of a talent. Comparing that to the wages of our time – at \$6.25/hr for menial labor --- a day’s wage would be about \$50. A talent, then, roughly one hundred times 50 = \$5,000. If the slave owes his master 10k talents, that is \$50M. That makes your student loan look like peanuts. Incidentally, a slave could never amass that size of debt. Jesus is overstating by several powers of ten. It is outrageous. Imagine Peter with his mouth wide open in disbelief.

In the parable, the royal decision is that the slave, his wife and children and everything he owns will be sold to offset the debt. This slave kneels before his master and pleads for mercy and patience from the king. He claims he will pay it back. But that is impossible. He could never incur such a debt and he certainly cannot pay such a debt. It is an unbelievable debt. It is an impossible burden.

Then the master feels compassion and forgives him the debt. Wonder of wonders! Sense the relief of being forgiven a \$50M debt! Whew!

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You and I have been forgiven a debt we can never repay? It's not a debt of money, but a debt of sin. In our mortal selves we have no power to sponge away our wrongdoing. How generous should we be, having received such forgiveness?

Jesus gives us this cleansing freely when we believe in Him. Do we rejoice every day – like the children of Israel seeing the enemy swallowed up in the Red Sea? Our enemy is sin and the death it brings.

The slave forgiven of the crushing debt steps out into the sunshine and immediately meets a fellow slave who owes him 100 denarii. That would be about \$5,000. The forgiven one grabs his fellow slave by the throat and demands payment.

The man falls to his knees and begs for patience. But the forgiven slave refuses. He throws him in prison. The king hears of it. He summons his ungracious slave. The king says, "Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?" You heard the rest.

He paid a debt He did not owe

I owed a debt I could not pay

I needed someone to wash my sins away

And now I sing a brand new song

Amazing Grace

Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay

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