June 18, 2017 All Saints’ Church

Proper 6 Year A

Exodus 19:2-8a Romans 5:1-8

Psalm 100 Matthew 9:35-10;8 (9-23)

Imagine a large room.

At the head of the room is a long table, where the Principal, the Dean of Faculty, and the Dean of Students sit. There’s a gavel.

About 180 people fill the room, in rows, mostly faculty, some administrators and staff. Many are drinking coffee, some are correcting students’ papers, even one teacher in the back is reading the New York Times.

It’s the weekly faculty meeting.

I’m a new faculty member, maybe 4 weeks in, still overwhelmed by the newness, taking it all in.

Near the end of the meeting, someone from the Development Office is speaking about the annual campaign which yielded 25 million dollars…..yet again….. another good year. I am in shock, but no one seems to be surprised. 25 million dollars! This is normal. This is what is raised every year to help with the costs of operations. OMG. Imagine this kind of security.

“Any questions?” the nice man from Development asks. The meeting is almost over; people are anxious to leave.

Before I know it, I am raising my hand (I hate it when this happens), “What percentage do we draw down from our endowment?”

“Three percent.”

“How did you come up with that formula? Seems kind of tight to me.”

The bell rings, the meeting is over, everyone is leaving, quickly. I am picking up my school bag, also in a bit of a rush, and as I look up, to get up, my chair is surrounded- the nice man from Development, the CFO, and a few others- I have no idea who most of them are.

Someone asks me, “How did you know to ask that question?”

“Oh that’s easy. Before I came here, I was a priest in a church that had an endowment and we were struggling with how much to draw down from our earnings, but we had none of the resources that you have here. Why not draw down one more percent… we could do a lot with another seven million dollars for those in need.”

“It’s not that simple.”

I learned later that I had hit a nerve. The heart of the matter. My question exposed a struggle the Board of Trustees was having: How are you good stewards of all that you have been given? How are you both responsible to your institution, yet take risks, give things away, fund new programs?

We at All Saints’ ask the same questions with as much intensity. What is our balance between our responsibility to maintaining this beautiful church and grounds and our mission to take risks, give things away and support those in need.

Raising my hand that day was a small gesture. But sometimes, if not often, change begins with small gestures. And sometimes as Jesus tells us, he will just put words in our mouth, causing us to be a bit of a troublemaker, using our fresh eyes to challenge and to preach the good news.

Our forefathers and foremothers of the faith were used in the same way. I think we have to remember this legacy. Imagine being told, especially when you are so aware of your own failings, and fears, and doubts, that you are going to become a nation, the bearers of a covenant, of a new law that will bring freedom to the land. Or that you will “proclaim the good news: cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.”

Who me? That’s like the most uncoordinated kid on the basketball court becoming the captain of the team. Or the third understudy becoming the lead in the play. Or an inexperienced teacher unwittingly challenging the trustees of a school.

How many times have we thought, “Not me, I’m not ready for this! How did I get myself in this mess? I’m afraid. What if I fail? Or who am I to deserve this opportunity? I’m not worthy.” This reluctance is just part of the human condition. There will always be a gap between who we are and who we aspire to be.

This is our faith: God comes rushing into the Gap. The Israelites or disciples didn’t choose to be a part of God’s covenant. They often ran from it. This steadfast commitment of God’s love for us is not depended on our success, capabilities, or even fulfillment.

No matter how we blow it, God’s covenant still holds.

Scripture tells us over and over that we were not “chosen” because we were an exemplary people of faith. No, we’re just a people, with all the struggles and worries and dread that any people have. Moses is almost stoned to death, numerous times by those he’s leading to freedom. Jesus is crucified by those he loved. Yet God keeps coming to us, pursuing us.

This is God’s eternal stance: “I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.”

Notice that God did not bring us to a land, to an accomplishment, or even to a certain purpose. God brought us to God’s Self. Here we are, in the Realm of God, in the Kingdom of God, which Jesus keeps reminding us, is Now. We are hanging onto dear life, holding onto those eagles’ wings, and God is flying us right into the center of God, and there we will be used as God sees fit. Now.

I like to think of the Incarnation in this way as well. Rather than think that Jesus ***had to become*** human to save us from the sin that Adam and Eve committed which eternally separated us God, let us imagine that Jesus’ love for us is so great, and like any love, he wants to be close to us, within us, for us, among us, and beside us. Love by its very nature wants to unite, wants to be one with its beloved. Jesus couldn’t but help to take human form, so great was his desire to be with us.

If so, then Jesus’ driving motivation to be in the world, is love, and only love; and then, by grace, we are saved by that love. Sometimes we reverse the order and lose that it was the power of love motivating the incarnation, not sin.

If this is true, how do we reflect God’s gift to us, God’s covenant with us to the world? What is our vocation as God’s minstrels then, if not to love, to make a joyful noise, to move people’s hearts and lift them up to delight and hope, praise and promise?

We are rooted in justice and mirrored in compassion. What do we do?

I am reminded of that sign in neighborhoods that many of us see, “Drive here as if your kids lived here.”

To think of all kids as our kids is a radical way to love. The good news calls us to this mindset, to this “heartset.” Our own kids are about to leave for their mission trip to Juarez and they get this heart thing. Those kids in Juarez are their brothers and sisters. They can hardly wait to see them again. They know when they are there, they are in the midst of living the Good News. They belong to each other. This is part of who we are, our vision for the world…. As well as our Community Supper which is celebrating its tenth year.

I have just learned this week (because All Saints’ is committed to the Peterborough Food Pantry) that we are going to have hungry kids this summer. Many of the feeding programs that are funded over the year, lose their support during the summer months. There is a gap.

Just as God rushes in to fill our gaps, we are called to do the same.

It’s a simple gesture. We have to start somewhere. Let’s be the church that supplies healthy snacks all summer long for our hungry kids. There are anywhere from 75-90 of us who come to church in the summer. Imagine if each one of us brings a six pack of juice, a package of granola bars, fruit or a can of applesauce every Sunday. Imagine the impact.

Our hungry kids in Peterborough are like sheep without a shepherd; the harvest is plentiful, with few laborers. Let’s labor on behalf of the vulnerable, so they will be less susceptible to having their promise squelched. We can begin. I’m not so naïve to think that this with resolve those who are food insecure, but let’s do something. Let’s start. Isn’t one of the demons in our world hunger? We can do something. We can invite our neighbors to join us as well.

We begin by being in the midst of good news and believing in our charge to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and cast out demons. God’s wings carry us to great vistas of splendor and also to places of great need. Let’s raise our hands in position of prayer, in simplicity, with snacks in them, and see where it takes us.

Amen.