

The Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost
Proper 21
Year A
October 1, 2017

First Reading: Exodus 16:2-15

Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45

Second Reading: Philippians 1:21-30

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

Preached by The Rev. John A. Satula
St. James Episcopal Church – Amesbury, MA

**In the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

One of the greatest accounts found in the Old Testament is the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Having heard the cry of His people, God raised up His servant Moses to lead the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt, from the whips of their taskmasters, to the Promised Land. After God sent ten plagues upon the Egyptians, Pharaoh finally releases the Israelites and they begin their long trek toward the Promised Land, a trek that was full of uncertainty. Shortly after their release different hardships arose. It was not soon after he released them that Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he decides to take his army in pursuit. The Israelites cry out for God to save them. They complain to Moses that they'd rather be slaves in Egypt than die in the desert. However, Moses says to them to be brave for the Lord will provide.

Upon reaching the Red Sea as Pharaoh's army drew closer Moses stretched out his hand over the Sea and God parted the waters and the Israelites were able to walk through on dry land escaping their pursuers for as the Egyptians followed them the sea comes back together swallowing the entire cohort. As the Israelites continued their journey we heard last week how there

arose a scarcity of food. Once again the people are scared and complain saying, it would have been better to eat their fill in Egypt than starve to death in the desert. God provides by sending quails upon their camp and raining down bread from heaven. Uncertainty and fear would arise again for them. We hear today as they continued their trek that there was no water. Once again the people complain and once again The Lord provides for them bringing water from a rock. And as their journey continued many other instances of uncertainty would arise. The road ahead was unknown and would continue to be hard. Their wandering at times could seem endless and at times the fear that God had abandoned them would take over. However, at every turn, through their forty-year trek through the wilderness, in all their times of uncertainty, God was with them and God provided for them. God was with them before they set out on their journey, God was with them once they reached the Promised Land and God is still with His faithful people today.

Some of the uncertainty the Israelites faced brought to the surface questions such as, what will the future hold? What will we do? Questions that can provoke feelings of fear, even dread. Many today are facing this uncertainty and fear. What will the future hold, what will we do are questions being asked within the Church concerning the Church as a whole, are questions we are perhaps asking in our own lives and are questions I have heard many asking on both the national and global stage. The political climate in this country is still tremendously volatile. Division amongst Americans seems to grow each day and we are right now having a heated controversy over our flag and National Anthem

with many on either side of aisle. We had a terrible riot this summer in Charlottesville, with people waving the battle flag of the Confederacy and flags with Swastikas on them. We continue to face an opioid crisis. We continue to fight horrific wild fires in California. Poverty, disease, homelessness, unemployment still effects countless people in this country and elsewhere. We are watching and listening as devastating hurricanes batter the Caribbean and our own country, plus 8 magnitude earthquakes reducing buildings to rubble and trapping and killing hundreds of people. We are experiencing a refugee crisis, we are still hearing of repeated battles and attacks in Iraq, Afghanistan, Venezuela. Terrorist attacks are still occurring throughout the world and there is great tension right now that we could be on the brink of an armed conflict, perhaps a nuclear war, with North Korea --- and the list goes on. No matter who we are, these instances among others can raise in us a myriad of questions and a fair amount of fear, fear over the uncertainty of the future just as the Israelites faced as they journeyed through the Wilderness. How do we ease this fear? How do we look ahead at times with joy and hope with all the pain the world is facing right now? One way I believe we do this my friends is by trusting in Jesus Christ, and what He brings right now, today, into our lives.

Last week I preached about the Seven Heavenly Virtues, one of which is hope. St. Paul speaks about the wonder of the virtue of hope in his first letter to the Corinthians and I feel we see Paul living out the ultimate hope, our ultimate hope in his Letter to the Philippians and what that hope brought to him in the shadow of uncertainty and fear. At the time Paul composed his Letter to the

Philippians his future was very uncertain. He was imprisoned at the time and did not know what the eventual outcome would be, however he knew there was a real possibility that he could be put to death as he mentions in the letter. What his final outcome was, we are unsure of, as there are differing views as to where and when this letter was composed. Philippians is a beautiful letter. One scholar writes “In the midst of suffering and uncertainty the theme of joy emerges quite clearly and remarkably” at several points throughout the letter. Paul’s deep love for his sisters and brothers in Philippi is evident in this letter and he commends both that love and his joy to the Philippians, joy that he prays will be theirs, joy found in Jesus Christ, joy which he makes manifest in this letter as he lives out that joy.

Paul is imprisoned, facing uncertainty, opposition, suffering; facing possible execution, and yet in this letter he speaks joyously of this time of imprisonment as it has enabled him to spread the Gospel. Paul writes in the first chapter of this letter, “I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the Gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.” He writes a little later on, “I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance. It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body,

whether by life or by death.” Paul is telling, showing the Philippians as well as all of us what it means to know Jesus Christ. In this time of uncertainty, of imprisonment, Paul finds joy in living the Gospel, joy that is stronger than uncertainty. Paul shows, teaches that the Gospel is able to be lived out even during times of uncertainty, times of fear, times of doubt, times of suffering and brings hope and joy into those times. In Paul’s uncertainty he is able find hope and joy in his belief in Jesus Christ and live that out. He is able to continue his ministry, continue living for Jesus who is our ultimate hope because in Him is always found hope, always found light. Sometimes what we need to do is to stop for a moment, stop in the middle of uncertainty, fear, doubt and when other times arise such as pain and suffering, stop and remember Jesus has come into our lives, which can help us to will and to persevere in whatever may lie ahead. Jesus came into the world bringing hope, hope which can be made real and manifest in our lives just as it was for Paul, helping us to will and persevere through uncertainty and in so doing bringing that hope to others.

Uncertainty is a part of this world and can bring great uneasiness into over lives. This has been true for many years. We see this in our Old Testament reading as the Israelites continue to face uncertainty, the uncertainty of the Wilderness and what lies ahead, if they will be able to survive, if God is with them. We see this uncertainty in Paul’s imprisonment as described in his letter to the Philippians and we see this uncertainty in our own lives and in the life of the world. When we think of all the disagreements, controversies and trouble that is present today, we must remember that in these times hope can be found by

depending on God, hope that is not in vain just as it was not in vain for the Israelites as they made their way through the Wilderness or for Paul, imprisoned in a dark cell facing possible death, for in these times God provided just as God continues to provide today. Uncertainty may not disappear or be completely dispelled, but through God, through Christ, we will be able to find hope in that uncertainty and through that hope, find joy. Paul says to us today, “it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” We are able to bring the goodness, the hope the joy of God into our lives and into the world, right now today, for God, Jesus is a part of us thriving within us, enabling us to hope for the coming of His Kingdom, a time when uncertainty will be no more, pain and hardship will be no more and pure joy will reign.

My friends God is in charge, God is in control, and it is in that that we can take solace and refuge and find hope trusting that everyday God’s Kingdom comes closer to completion here on earth. And my friends it is a Kingdom that is here and growing and whose joy we, we can bring all the more into this life as we continue our journey, our trek which leads us to our Promised Land, the Kingdom of Heaven fully realized on earth, all uncertainty and fear vanquished and life forever, in the presence, joy and love of Almighty God.

To God be Glory, Majesty, Honor and Praise
forever and ever. Amen.