

7 September 2014 13th Sunday after Pentecost

Exodus 12: 1-14

Psalm 149

Romans 13: 1-10

Matthew 18:10-20

[Proper 18A/Ordinary 23A/Pentecost +13 September 7, 2014](#) Textweek

In the first reading we have an account of the first Passover, a feast so important to the Jewish tradition that it had to be preserved in the early church, and so Easter which is central to the Christian tradition is linked to the Passover festival.

The reading begins with “*The LORD said to Moses and Aaron*” and continues with a dramatic Cecil B de Mills dialogue in which God gives his instructions to Moses and Aaron. As we listen to this Divine conversation are we not left with a simple question; why is ‘the Lord’ completely silent today?

And as we contemplate the question, and really explore that question, we come across a disturbing possibility; perhaps the question is really about who or what silences the voice of ‘the Lord’; and as we ponder that possibility we encounter a further disturbing possibility, perhaps it is the Church that silences the Divine voice!

Today’s Old Testament text presents us with a number of challenges, and they are challenges that would not have even occurred to the oppressed community of Jews in Egypt.

For example, the detailed instructions from God, what do we understand of their significance? How do we make sense of the rushed meal, and the smearing of blood on the door posts? The 6th century BCE of Hebrew people would have an appreciation that we no longer have.

And how do we reconcile with our theology the slaughter of the firstborn, the partial genocide of the Egyptians, which is presented as a Divine act?

Such challenges in the Scriptures, if not explored, can so easily diminish our appreciation of the Bible as ‘the word of God’.

And even if we leave behind the challenges that are there in the detail of the text we are still left with questions in relation to the overall dynamic between God and humanity.

If God speaks so clearly to Moses and Aaron, why does God not speak so clearly today?

So maybe God is only silent today in the hearing of the Church.

The bible was already considered a closed canon by the early church sometime in the third century and the authority of the Bible is defined in the Church of England’s Thirty-Nine Articles of 1563:

VI. Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation.

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.

What that means is that a group of Church leaders determined the confines of God's 'Word'; they confined the 'Word of God' and the remembrance of God to dialogues and practices that served only one group of people, in one place at one time in history.

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It is somewhat ironic that the book of Exodus is confined by the canon of Scripture, and yet the book of Exodus is a text entirely about the path to freedom.

So how do we and how can we make sense of the Scriptures?

Going back to the first reading and the narrative of the Passover, what we might look for is a reflection of today in the story: we seek a parallel for ourselves that engages the process that is being illuminated through the narrative.

Contemplate your own journey toward freedom, the journey back to the Divine dwelling place, and in that process we discover our enslavement, or perhaps hold tight to our delusion.

It appears listening to our government that Australia is already free from the effects of global warming, or are we really enslaved to the economic rewards of fossil fuels?

As we contemplate our own journey toward freedom, we can discover both our delusions and our enslavements.

As we continue to reflect through the narrative we might then determine when and within what family our journey to freedom will begin; what food we will need for our journey. Where will we start, what doorpost will mark our point of movement and how will we mark that place for ourselves.

Next, rather than consider what peoples will need to be slaughtered, consider that which will need to die in order for us to find life's fullness; we do all hold on to so many 'Egyptians'. This part of the process echoes last week's gospel: "*those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*"

Passover and Easter are openings to freedom, openings to life's fullness and both begin in places of enslavement and death, Egypt and the stone at the door of the tomb are the same.

The movements described in the narratives of Passover and Easter are narratives of life and they provide openings for us to step through into the garden of Divine abundance.

If we found some challenges in the first reading, the second also has some similar ones for again it is very much addressed to a people, and a place and time that are very different from the world of today.

Paul encourages us to "*be subject to the governing authorities*"; what does he mean by this, is he saying to us that we should do what the government of Australia tells us to do?

Hopefully, or thankfully the answer is no!

The call to “*be subject to the governing authorities*” is followed by a definition, “*the authorities are God's servants*”; and that definition rules out our government.

Again if we follow the process we looked at for the first reading, we can find the real challenge in this reading for us in the present day.

Paul's words ask us to consider the influences that we are subject to; some are obvious and some are probably either unconscious or subconscious and driven by emotional forces that are deeply rooted in our past.

Again we are looking at an insight that provides us with an orientation to life's fullness; and our claim to be 'the body of Christ' requires that we attend to the authorities, and influences that we are subject to.

The ask of us is that we "*be subject to the governing authorities*" for "*the authorities are God's servants*"; we should therefore become aware of the influences that serve the Divine purpose, and also of those that take us away from that purpose.

We could list some of the influences that govern our lives; on the downside we might find economic influences, fears, prejudices, apathy; and on the upside love, generosity, humility and empathy. However, for each and every one of us, we will have to contemplate Paul's words and look within ourselves; and as we look perhaps we will also find an Egypt within our inner landscape, a place from which we start our journey to freedom, our Exodus.

If we need further encouragement to really engage these texts and the processes they have illuminated, then perhaps we should consider the gospel commission that we receive today.

"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

A couple of weeks ago we heard this very same commission given to Peter, and we could therefore all leave the Church that Sunday having passed the parcel, we'll leave it for Peter to do.

The Catholic Church venerates the pope, as the one who walks in Peter's footsteps; they leave it up to the pope and hope he will be better than the last pope.

Today we hear that the commission is given to each and every one of us

"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

None of us are going to heaven; for each and everyone of us is creating heaven by that which we bind and loose on earth.

As we contemplate our own journey toward freedom; as we become aware of the influences that we are and seek to be subject to, so we also bind and loose....

"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."