

"Two or Three"

Exodus 12:1-14; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20
September 10, 2017 -- 23 Ordinary

Exodus 12:1-14

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: {2} This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. {3} Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. {4} If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. {5} Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. {6} You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. {7} They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. {8} They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. {9} Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. {10} You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. {11} This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. {12} For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. {13} The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. {14} This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

Romans 13:8-14

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. {9} The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." {10} Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. {11} Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; {12} the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; {13} let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. {14} Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Matthew 18:15-20

"If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. {16} But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. {17} If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. {18} 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. {19} Again , truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. {20} For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

It's a good day to hear Jesus tells us that wherever two or three are gathered he's there with us. For one thing with the weather like it is I knew there might be literally two or three of us here. _____ There's something comforting about that, especially coupled with our faith that in our interconnectedness as members of Christ body. Anyway, it's good to be here today with you.

If you're like me you've probably been tuned into all sorts of t.v. and internet following the path, excuse me the "track" of Irma. We always approach hurricane season with some sense of fear and trepidation or at least wariness. For months now the NHC and local Emergency Management have been repeating the mantra. It's hurricane season. Get ready. Be prepared. Which of course is solid advice. Although, sometimes it's difficult to know exactly what 'be prepared means.' There are certainly enough signs and warnings around. And then the real life reality check that Harvey has been and now Irma looms. Even when you've done it all. It always seems like there's something more you ought to do. Maybe leave? Some yes. But here we are. And in all that your pastor says, "Eh" we might as well have worship. But sooner or later, and usually at night, the storm, with whatever it has to bring – arrives.

I'm about to make one of those huge homiletical, that's a fancy word for preaching jump. It seems as if the people of Israel in the story of the Exodus must share some of the same emotions with us. Don't you wonder what those people of Israel must have been thinking in those days building up to the Exodus. Moses shows back up in Egypt and word starts spreading that the people are supposed to pack their carpet bags and get ready to go – somewhere. Something, life altering is going to happen and they're going to flee. Along comes Moses and like the Weather Channel he tells them that they need an exit plan. For months they've heard the news and seen and experienced things they've never seen before.

Water turned into blood, Frogs, Lice, Flies and fleas – oh my, Boils,
Thunderstorms of hail and fire, Locusts, Darkness three days --

Then the news alert comes – it's time. The word from on high to Moses is 'tell the whole congregation of Israel...' and then there all of these strange instructions, the lamb and the doorpost and the unleavened bread. All of which say – you need to be prepared. You have to be ready. Don't you wonder how they got the word out. Was there a phone tree? What if somebody didn't get the message?

This is what they were supposed to do. This is how on this night they were to be faithful. All of this is of course to let the people know that on this night, with this special meal, that God is going to do something so devastating, so catastrophic that they will be able to leave this place, but they will have to leave in a hurry, in a great hurry. All they have to do is be ready and have faith.

On this Passover night in Egypt the people of Israel, the nation of Yahweh, had one thing to do, one commandment to follow, be faithful to God's instructions, protect yourself and live.

Today it is Jesus Christ that calls us, like Moses of old, to faithfulness in God. When we look around us in our world today this call to be faithful, to be the church is just as vital to us as the call to be ready was to the ancient Israelite. There is so much in this world today that can snap away our lives in an instant, in the blink of an eye, and our call, is to be ready.

It seems for all the world as if we are standing in the dark night and waiting for a passover event to purge the evil from around us. Paul reminds us again today of our tasks as followers of Christ. Live the law of love.

Isn't it amazing how we revert to 'loving our neighbor' when crisis looms or is coming? I was in a fairly lengthy line in the grocery store yesterday. Picking up storm essentials like potato chips. Ahead of me was an older African American

lady, a young Hispanic guy with two little ones in his cart, a twenty something white woman with an FSU t-shirt. There was a teenager at the register. Ordinary looking kid that I've seen before and who I could never remember saying a word. He struck me as being very shy. But not so yesterday. With every person in that line there was this interesting and to me fascinating interaction. There were words of concern, inquiries about whether people were staying or going, and by the time I got to him I knew where he lived, what zone he was in and more. As they were leaving there was a mutual exchange of stay safe and from this young man something I'm sure wasn't in the Publix guide for customer service as he said, "God bless you." When I got there we had the same conversation and I didn't tell him I was a pastor, I'm proud of you, although I was. I wanted Jesus to bless me too.

I went out to the car and thought to myself. What an interesting place for two or three to be gathered. Because one thing is for sure. Jesus was there.

We've seen it played out over the last few weeks and we'll see it played out in the days to come. Where two or three gather to respond to need, to crisis – love your neighbor becomes a reality. A different kind of flood rises, a flood, not of devastation, but a flood pouring out love and concern for the one another.

In the aftermath of natural disaster, earthquake, fire, flood, hurricane, tornado two or three gather to help and Jesus is there. Where war and politics make life nearly impossible and people, like the people of Israel, become an immigrant population, where two or three people get together to help – Jesus is there.

Jesus has a way of reducing the monumental global problems we face to proportions we can understand. In the passage from Matthew today we have an interesting little set of instructions from Jesus. Jesus who knows what our calling is, who knows as Christians our vocation is that we love one another. Jesus offers

us words to live by.

Isn't Jesus telling us that no matter what, even when it seems like we aren't making any progress, even when it seems as if the dream is fading, as if the oppression of the world will never let up, we are supposed to hang in there and keep plugging away. To keep trying.

And as if to confirm this Jesus tells us, "Again , truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Wherever two or more of us are gathered, Christ is with us. Our task as the church is to be ready. To gird our loins, to put on our shoes, to keep our staff in hand, so that when the crisis comes, in the middle of the night or in the light of day, we stand resolute and faithful and trust in the name of our God so that they pass over us and we survive to live and love for Christ in the church.

It's good to be gathered here this morning. Two or three or thirty or a hundred. Jesus is here and as always he says to us, 'don't be afraid, I am with you.'"