**Sermon170827**

**St. Stephen’s, Seattle**

**Pentecost 12, Proper 16(A)**

**Collect**

Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**Exodus 1:8-2:10**

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, “When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.” But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?” The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.”

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him, “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, “because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

**Psalm 124**

If the Lord had not been on our side,  
let Israel now say;

If the Lord had not been on our side,  
when enemies rose up against us;

Then would they have swallowed us up alive  
in their fierce anger toward us;

Then would the waters have overwhelmed us  
and the torrent gone over us;

Then would the raging waters  
have gone right over us.

Blessed be the Lord!  
he has not given us over to be a prey for their teeth.

We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler;  
the snare is broken, and we have escaped.

Our help is in the Name of the Lord,  
the maker of heaven and earth.

### Romans 12:1-8

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

### Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

**Sermon**

Have you ever noticed that it’s easy to panic

when everyone around you is panicking?

Or that it is easier to remain calm

when everyone else remains calm?

It’s been a bad week for calm.

I have been amazed at just how many people are upset,

and for how many reasons.

The most airtime seems devoted to free speech and racism,

but other things are going on as well.

What does it mean for us to be a civil society?

What does it mean to be orderly, just, and compassionate?

Many of my own buttons have been pushed.

I’ve been surprised at my own emotions,

and the strength of my own emotions.

So, what do we do when the world gets this way?

How do we navigate between the calm of peacemakers

and the righteous anger of prophets?

Jesus said, “Put your sword back into its place;

for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” (Matthew 26:52)

He also said, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth;

I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” (Matthew 10:34)

Those are both in the Gospel of Matthew by the way.

It’s not an easy question.

When should we be upset and make a fuss,

and when should we be calm and plug on?

And, above all, what should we be doing right now?

I’d like to suggest a three-part answer:

First, listen and learn

Second, figure out what’s important

Third, act on your convictions

L-F-A: listen, figure, act.

That sounds like pretty generic advice,

but it can be hard to remember

when things get rough.

I also think that Christians can, and should,

Do this in a particular way.

Listen. Figure. Act.

Step one: listen to yourself.

Augustine has a wonderful quote about hope.

“Faith tells us only that God is.

Love tells us that God is good.

But hope tells us that God will work God’s will.

And hope has two lovely daughters:

anger and courage.

Anger so that what cannot be, may not be.

And courage, so that what must be, will be.”

Let me say that again.

“Faith tells us only that God is.

Love tells us that God is good.

But hope tells us that God will work God’s will.

And hope has two lovely daughters:

anger and courage.

Anger so that what cannot be, may not be.

And courage, so that what must be, will be.”

Anger is not evil.

Anger is our injustice warning system.

I’m not saying it doesn’t go wrong; it goes wrong all the time,

but that will be step two.

First, know that you’re angry.

Give thanks that you can get angry.

It means you know the difference between the way things are

and the way things are supposed to be.

Anger motivates us to fix injustice, to ourselves and to others.

This acceptance of anger comes at a cost, though.

If anger can be a good thing for me,

it can be a good thing for others as well.

We must listen to others.

We must accept that, often, they are angry, too.

We must note, at least in theory, that their anger is also a sign of some injustice.

Give thanks that others can get angry.

It means that they know the difference between the way things are

and the way things ought to be.

And, let’s face it, much in the world is not as it ought to be.

There is enough anger to go around.

I find this simple reflection goes a long way

toward helping me treat my opponent as a neighbor, rather than an enemy.

So far, there is no right or wrong.

There is no good or bad.

There is only the way things are and the way people feel about it.

There is only neighbors disagreeing.

Paul put it this way:

“For by the grace given to me

I say to everyone among you

not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think,

but to think with sober judgment,

each according to the measure of faith

that God has assigned.

For as in one body we have many members,

and not all the members have the same function,

so we, who are many, are one body in Christ,

and individually we are members one of another.”

Of course, listening to self and others is not enough.

I am not a relativist.

Not all anger is equal, in strength or justice or consequences.

More will be needed.

Step two: listen to God.

Figure out what’s important.

A quote from Philippians 3:

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection

and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death,

if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this

or have already reached the goal;

but I press on to make it my own,

because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own;

but this one thing I do:

forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,

I press on towards the goal

for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind;

and if you think differently about anything,

this too God will reveal to you.

Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.”

What is important?

What are we working for?

Faith, hope, and love.

We work to build relationships, between us and between us and God.

We work to build people up.

We work to help the last and the least, to find the lost, and to love them all.

Why are we here?

We are here to love one another as Christ loved us,

and gave himself for us, and offering and a sacrifice to God.

When Paul says: “present your bodies as a living sacrifice.”

He means that we, like Jesus, enter into relationships with others

for their sake,

and for the sake of God.

It is difficult and painful to move beyond,

“I am angry” to

“we are broken.”

But this is what Jesus models for us

and this is what we are called to do – to love one another.

The anger does not go away, but it gains a concrete purpose.

We turn our anger over to God,

so that good anger can become courageous action,

and bad anger – selfish or mistaken anger – can be released.

What is important to me?

You are.

Whoever you are.

Focusing means remembering that the image of God exists in every person.

Then, I can ask concrete questions.

What can I do that will address my anger, but also serve the needs of the world?

What can I do that will promote grace, peace, and justice?

And that brings us to step three: act.

Steps one and two are never enough by themselves.

The whole point of anger was that it got us moving.

It was good because it was productive.

(Anger that simmers without an outlet is never good.)

You can do something.

You may not be able to change the law or our representatives –

at least not until the next election.

You may not be able to magically make America great, or kind, or fair.

But, if you were listening, those were not the goal,

at least not by themselves.

What was the goal? (To love.)

You can love your neighbor, here and now.

You can find someone who doesn’t feel heard and hear them.

You can find someone who doesn’t feel cared for and care for them.

You can speak truth to those who do not know truth (kindly).

You can feed the hungry, tend the sick, support widows and orphans.

We don’t do that for the sake of a better society.

We do that because that is the better society.

Jesus did not die to magically transform the Roman Empire.

Some of the most profound injustices

took place in the centuries following his death.

Jesus lived to enter into relationship with the people of Judea.

God with us.

And those people spread out and created relationships with the people

of the Roman Empire and the world.

We don’t always get it right.

The world is not magically different,

but it is different.

It is, I think better, not magically by a Divine wave of the hand,

but prosaically, doggedly, patiently and diligently,

by the daily actions of Christ Jesus, working in us,

his body in the world.

It is not magical or immediate, but it is miraculous.

What is the goal? (To love.)

You must ask yourself these questions every day.

What do I feel?

What is my focus?

What must I do?

And do it.

“Do not be conformed to this world,

but be transformed by the renewing of your minds,

so that you may discern what is the will of God—

what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

“whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven,

and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

It is up to you.

Only you know.

Only you can listen to your own heart.

Only you can hear God’s call for you.

And only you can act.

The world will panic when it should be calm.

It will be calm when it should be in an uproar.

You have within you the ability to listen, to focus, and to act.

Thanks be to God.