

Pentecost 3-June 18, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Exodus 19:2-8, Romans 5:1-8, Matthew 9:35-10:8

**The Harvest is Plentiful** Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

“Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.”

Have you ever responded to someone with words that you thought they wanted to hear, but your response may not have been completely true or more than likely a complete lie?

Applicants for jobs aren't likely to admit to the people that are interviewing them for new employment that they lack organizational skills or don't understand what is meant by being a self-starter. If you want the job that you are applying for, you are more likely to respond with the words that an employer wants to hear you say. My first band teacher at Tri-Valley and two of my piano teachers required that I keep an accurate log of the minutes that I spent each day practicing. Each teacher gave a minimum requirement for practicing each day and I somehow managed to meet or exceed that requirement with the times I entered on the practice chart. I got quite good at averaging my practice times on this chart so they wouldn't suspect that I might not be telling the truth. In my mind, I was easily a better trombone player than the other two trombone players at Tri-Valley, so I thought my teacher couldn't help but appreciate having me in his band regardless of the minutes of practicing I recorded on his chart. These teachers turned up the potential guilt of recording my practice times by requiring a parent to sign off that you were telling the truth. But as with all sins of any size, once you feel you are getting by with your sin and you don't seem to be punished for it, soon you no longer feel the guilt and fudging on the rules gets easier and easier.

In the premarital assessment that I use for couples who ask me to officiate their wedding service, one category deals with their faith. These couples respond separately to questions that deal with the importance of church attendance, support and how important they feel prayer life will be in their marriage. The responses range on a scale of 1-5 with 1 meaning not very important at all to 5 meaning extremely important. Couples who want to get married, know the right response to make, especially to a pastor. When the couples have responded that attending and financially supporting a church home is extremely important to them, I ask them where they are attending worship services, but often they are quick to respond, they just haven't decided where yet.

In the first reading from Exodus for today, God's chosen people thought they knew the response that the Lord would want to hear. At this point in time, the Israelites had witnessed firsthand or heard stories from their direct ancestors about the power of God. They knew that the Lord could part the sea with his word to bring people to safety and he could also destroy armies of people by causing the sea to drown them. They had heard of the extreme wickedness of the world at the time of Noah and how the Lord destroyed every breathing animal and person except Noah and his family with the flood. So, when Moses came down from the mountain with a list of things to obey, they provided the Lord with a response that they thought would make him happy. Without exception they said in one voice, “Everything that you have told us to do, we will do.”

These words probably put Moses' mind at ease too after hearing their constant complaints in the wilderness. Moses was glad to hear these words too. Scripture doesn't record what the Lord was thinking after hearing this, but if it were recorded, it likely would have been a burst of laughter.

God's chosen people have always thought the Lord wants to hear that we will obey his every command. However, all efforts to be obedient throughout history have failed. The commandments were first given to Moses and God's chosen people in verbal form. Obedience didn't happen then, so the Lord wrote the commandments out on tablets of stone. Still no obedience. God's chosen people wanted to have judges preside over these laws and prescribe severe enough punishment to encourage obedience, but once again, no luck.

However, the Lord knew from the very beginning of time that the solution to sin was not going to be found by our responses to obedience. This is what is called a theologian of glory. A theologian of glory tells the Lord what they think they should say. A theologian of the cross has a much different response to the Lord. A theologian of the cross simply confesses the truth. You have already articulated your response today in the part of the liturgy called the Kyrie. Every worship service in our parish begins admitting that we are sinners and then our response to God is the Kyrie. The Kyrie does not say that we will do everything that the Lord tells us to do. Kyrie doesn't ask the Lord to be more specific in his rules or dole out harsher punishment so that we will be driven to be more obedient. When we sing or speak the Kyrie, our response is simply Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy. Our response to our inability to obey the Lord's commands is to ask the Lord for forgiveness.

This is the only way that we can have the complete peace of God that Paul preached about in the second lesson from Romans for today. We have peace since we are not justified by what we do, but by our faith in Jesus. The Lord who is the creator of heaven and earth has no responsibility to prove his love for us. But he does it anyway. The Lord doesn't wait until we are showing signs of improvement or obedience to show his love for us. Instead, the Lord proves his love for us while we are yet sinners in need of mercy. The Lord loves to hear our response to him to be merciful to us when we are told to be faithful to him. His faithfulness to us is not dependent on our efforts of obedience to the Lord. His faithfulness simply needs to be declared to his chosen people.

This is why when Jesus looked out at the people that day, he had compassion on them because they did not look as if they had peace. They realized all their efforts to please God had failed. They had heard the law from Moses but had not heard the gospel from Jesus.

Jesus told his disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest so that there would be laborers to freely spread this good news. The good news is our response to the Lord of what we think he wants to hear, but the Lord's response to us which brings us peace. A surprising response came back from the Lord after the disciples prayed for laborers for the harvest, the Lord said, "You are the laborers." And now you have heard the gospel and you have become the laborers. You have freely been given this message, freely give this good news to others. Amen