



KNOW • GROW • CONNECT • SERVE • GLORIFY

Eastminster Worship Services

Sunday, December 20, 2009

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You

Never Stuck

Revelation 12:15-42

Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh, Senior Pastor

We are never stuck. Remember and wait. Wait for Jesus whose face we all know because somewhere in the past we have faintly seen it, whose life we all thirst for because somewhere in the past we have seen it lived. Remember him who himself always remembers us as he has promised to do. To have faith is to remember and wait. We are never stuck. This is the message of Advent. Advent is the arrival, coming and discovery of something extremely important.

Advent reminds us that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, lived obediently, suffered and died, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. It reminds us that Jesus will return again and consummate the new heaven and new earth. Advent speaks directly to the plague of doubt.

Moses asked God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”¹ God said to Moses, “‘I Am Who I Am.’ This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I Am has sent me to you.”²

Moses was told by God to tell Pharaoh to let God’s people go. Pharaoh resisted. Moses persisted even in the midst of the plagues causing him doubt. After each plague, Pharaoh resisted. Moses persisted.

Passover is a profound example of God’s glory displayed and the people of God becoming unstuck. This last act of God led Pharaoh to demand that the people leave Egypt. Through this last act of God in Egypt, the people learned that they were never stuck. Even in the pain and suffering of slavery, they were not stuck. God was working out his good will and pleasure. God told the people to remember that they are never stuck. We are to remember the same. Remember and wait.

Every once and awhile, if you’re like me, you have a dream that wakes you up. Sometimes it’s a bad dream; a dream in which shadows become so menacing that your heart skips a beat and you come awake to the

¹Exodus 3:13

knowledge that even the actual darkness of night is as fearsome as the dreamed darkness. Sometimes the dream is sad. Or the dream is pleasurable. All dreams, however, ask of us to remember. No matter what the emotion of the dream, the common denominator is to remember. Once we remember there is a peace so deep; a sense of well-being so complete and intense.

Remembering is about memory. Memory is about identity. Identity is at the core of how we go about the day to day patterns of our existence. For God's people, memory plays a profound role in keeping us on track in all circumstances in which we find ourselves.

The nine plagues wrecked havoc on both Egyptian and Israelite. Pharaoh resisted letting the people go. Moses persisted in believing that God would be faithful. Moses remembered I Am Who I am. Pharaoh resisted through his hardened heart. The people of God were stuck, but not really. It would be through the nine plagues and the tenth in particular that the people of God would see that their lives had been anything but stuck. As the people remembered the promises made by I Am Who I Am, they were encouraged and strengthened.

The final and tenth plague was the plague on the firstborn. Every firstborn son in Egypt would die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, to the firstborn son of the slave girl and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. But the Israelites would be spared. Pharaoh refused to listen for the LORD hardened his heart. Following Passover, Pharaoh demanded that the people leave Egypt.

God outlined a seven day period for the people to prepare for the plague on the firstborn. For seven days they were to eat only bread made without yeast; for seven days no yeast was to be found in their houses; anyone who ate yeast would be cut off from the community; they were to slaughter on the seventh day year-old males without defect from the sheep or the goats; the animals were to be slaughtered at midnight; then the community was to splatter some of the blood on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses; that same night they were to eat the meat roasted over a fire along with bitter herbs and bread made without yeast; on that same night, I Am Who I Am would pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn, both men and animals; on that same night, God would bring judgment on the gods of Egypt. But I Am Who I Am would pass over the Israelites homes.

The people were commanded to celebrate this ritual every year to commemorate how God brought the people out of Egypt. They were to remember what God had done; moving them from their perspective of being

²Exodus 3:14

stuck to unstuck. The people lived in Egypt for 430 years. But because the LORD kept vigil, they left Egypt that night of the pass over. God kept vigil and now the people were to do the same; to honor the LORD for the generations to come. The people of God are never stuck. Remember and wait.

To remember is a conscious act of the will. But honestly, aren't we great escape artists, you and I? We don't like to get too serious about things, especially about ourselves. When we are with other people, we are apt to talk about almost anything under the sun except for what really matters to us, except for our own lives, except for what is going on inside under our own skins. We pass the time of day. We chatter. We hold each other at bay; keep our distance from each other even when God knows it is precisely each other that we desperately need.

We need to remember on purpose. Not just the content of dreams, but to remember the events, challenges, heartaches, celebrations and other moments in our lives that were shaping. As followers of Jesus Christ we must remember and recall those times in our lives when we were stuck, but became unstuck. We must remember that the Word of God tells us who we are and how we are to live and in those moments of being stuck, we must remember the things that really matter and how the Word of God never leaves us the same. God is faithful. We must remember that.

When we examine the obedience of Moses and the obstinacy of Pharaoh, we have a positive example of remembering before us. Moses represented God unashamedly while maintaining a full confidence in his ability to deliver the people. We are to do the same in the midst of those times that we feel stuck. But to do this, we must remember that even when circumstances insist that we are stuck, we are not stuck. We do that by believing when it is hard to believe. Remember and wait.

The hour is now for followers of Jesus to wake up. We must resist consumerism when it comes to worship, learning and serving. We must remember from what we have been saved and the cost of that salvation. As Paul writes in Romans, "The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than we first believed."³ We must rise up and reclaim our remembering what salvation really is. We have been saved from eternal separation from the Father. We have been given eternal life and promises on which to bank our hope in order to live an abundant life. We must hold each other accountable to orthodoxy and faithful adherence to the Great Commission and Great Commandment. As Matthew writes, "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be

³Romans 13:11

bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."⁴

In Jesus Christ, we are never stuck. You are not stuck. To remember is to remember countless times when you might have given up, gone under, when humanly speaking you might have gotten lost beyond the power of any to find you. But, to the contrary, you were not stuck. You remembered that I Am Who I Am is always for you and not against you. You remembered that Jesus said "I am the light of the world. I am the bread of life. I am the way and the truth and the life."

Seek I Am Who I Am and his strength continually. It is in God as we know him in and through Jesus Christ that we know hope. Hope is the driving power of faith. We are never stuck as followers of Jesus. Oh the Israelites felt stuck. But Moses persisted in the midst of Pharaoh's resistance. There is never a time that God isn't with us as the strength beyond our strength, the wisdom beyond our wisdom.

To remember is to see that we are here today by grace. We have survived as a gift. As weak as we are, strength beyond our strength has pulled us through. Foolish as we are, wisdom beyond our wisdom has flickered up just often enough to light us to the right path. Faint of heart as we are, a love beyond our power to love has kept our hearts alive. This is the truth of the gospel. Believe anew in Jesus Christ this day. To have faith is to remember and wait; and to wait is to have what we're waiting for already begin to come true. Remember and wait for we have hope. We are never stuck. Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. Let us pray!

*This sermon was preached on Sunday, 20 December 2009 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh
at Eastminster Presbyterian Church in Wichita, Kansas*

Copyright © 2009
Steven M. Marsh
All rights reserved.

E A S T M I N S T E R P R E S B Y T E R I A N C H U R C H
1958 N. Webb Road • Wichita, Kansas 67206-3404 • p 316.634.0337 f 316.634.1496 • www.eastminster.org

⁴Matthew 18:18