

**2ND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, June 11, 2017**  
**Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Honolulu, HI**

**THE LESSONS (Proper 12)**

**Exodus 19:2-8a**

**Psalm 69:7-10, [11-15], 16-18**

**Romans 6:1b-11**

**Matthew 10:24-39**

**THE SERMON: “Christianity Isn’t For Wimps...”**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

**Introduction**

From the number of jokes about priests and rabbis, you’d think that they spend a lot of time together. Unfortunately, most rabbis and priests don’t spend much time together but those jokes do show there is a shared humor about our similarities and differences. And, maybe we find humor because most of us understand and respect the deep passion and love they have for their respective religious perspectives. Maybe someday we will be able to tell “priest, rabbi, and imam” jokes. Maybe we’ll recycle that old joke about the priest and the rabbi who walked into a bar and change it to “a priest and a rabbi and an imam walk into a bar and the bartender will ask, ‘Wait a minute... is this a joke?’” Oh, come on, you know that’s how most of the priest and rabbi jokes start with them walking into a bar... boy, are you slow... Well, maybe you remember this one about a priest, rabbi, and imam who were having dinner together and the priest was chewing and chomping on his ham sandwich and teased, “I know it’s against your religions but this ham is sure delicious. When will you two break down and have some delicious ham with me?” They both answered back without hesitation, “We’ll have some ham at your wedding dinner...”

**Exodus 19:2-8a**

I guess a point of the joke is that religious people do have to make some sacrifices for the sake of their faith. But, things like dietary laws or celibacy are not what religious faith is about. That’s what God told Moses to tell the Israelites when God said, “... You have seen what I did to the Egyptians... Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples... but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation...” And, the people told Moses, “Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.” But, we know the whole story; the Exodus and the Old Testament are one broken promise after another and, despite their unfaithfulness, God keeps forgiving these stubborn, stiff-necked Jews. Oh, right, I say that but I’m exactly like them. I can say, “I’m baptized and forgiven,” but in the next breath I’m talking stink about someone or letting my mind leap into some cesspool of fantasy. I’m no different than the Israelites; I make promises to God but I keep tripping up. That’s why I like what Paul wrote to the Romans, “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” That’s me! And, I think that’s what so much of the Old Testament is about. Wars, killing, rape, incest, adultery, cheating, prejudice - it’s all there - all the horrible things that human beings do to each other and to ourselves. It’s no wonder people ask, “Is that how God’s people should act?” And, of course, the answer is, “No!” Even God’s people aren’t perfect and we do those horrible things we’re not supposed to but,

despite all of our flaws and mistakes and nastiness, the Old Testament keeps telling us that God forgives. That's why I cringe when Christians say that the Old Testament is "Law" and the New Testament is "Love." They aren't reading the same Bible I read; the Old Testament is all about God's love for imperfect, sinful people. The Old Testament and the New Testament are consistent in that. Our Exodus lesson is echoed in Peter's First Letter, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

### **Psalm 69:7-10, [11-15], 16-18**

Being "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" isn't easy. Sometimes speaking for God will result in what the psalmist experienced when he stood up for his faith, "It is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that shame has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my kindred, an alien to my mother's children." Scholars think this was written when Ezra and Nehemiah and the returning Exiles were trying to rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem's walls and the non-Exiles kept trying to sabotage their efforts and that's why the psalmist exclaimed what Jesus did when he overturned the moneychangers' tables in the Temple, "It is zeal for your house that has consumed me; the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." The Exiles knew what it felt like not being able to worship God and that's why they wanted to rebuild the Temple. Like Christians, the Jews knew that the Temple was only a building but it was a place where they gathered with other believers. Like Christians they understood the importance of community, the importance of affirming the faith together. But, the non-Exiles had lived without a Temple for 70 years and maybe they felt that the returning Exiles were indirectly accusing them for their lack of faith because they hadn't even tried to rebuild Jerusalem, the Holy City. Who knows? But, we do know the Exiles were treated badly: "... the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me. When I humbled my soul with fasting, they insulted me... I am the subject of gossip for those... and the drunkards make songs about me." The rest of the psalm sounds like a "911 call" that God doesn't answer, "... as for me, my prayer is to you, O Lord... in the abundance of your steadfast love, answer me.... rescue me from sinking in the mire... Do not let the flood sweep over me... Answer me, O Lord... Do not hide your face from your servant, for I am in distress... set me free because of my enemies." But, in the end of the psalm, which isn't in this lesson, the psalmist knows God will be faithful and God will deliver them. And, because we know history, we know the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt. God is faithful when God's people are faithful.

### **Matthew 9:35-10:8 [9-23]**

Our gospel lesson affirms that God is faithful when God's people are faithful. Jesus summons his disciples to go out and proclaim the good news. They're not supposed to take money or food or extra clothing. They're supposed to go to Jewish towns - "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And, Jesus warns them, "... I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves... Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils... and you will be dragged before governors and kings... But the one who endures to the end will be saved." Were they successful or were they failures? We can guess they didn't get arrested or dragged before governors but Matthew doesn't tell us what happened when the twelve returned from their mission. It certainly wasn't like what Luke reported when the 72 returned from their mission and demons were cast out, people were healed, and sinners were saved. Matthew just warns us that it won't be easy. But, we know what happens after the gospels were written. God's people were faithful and God kept growing the church. But, it never was easy. It almost seems that Matthew remembers what Jesus told the twelve disciples when he sent them out and

applied Jesus' warnings to his First Century persecuted church because all those things - the persecution, the arrests, the trials, the betrayals were all happening. Why would those early Christians endure all of that? I think they had a deep and abiding love of God that made them look beyond themselves and made them love others so much that they saw the same harvest that Jesus saw. They saw the crowds and had compassion because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Can you see that around you? Look at all the lonely people! Look at all the angry people! Look at chaos and hopelessness painted by our media! Who is telling them there is hope! Not a hope in just making America great but a real hope in God who is faithful and just. The harvest is plenty but the laborers are few!

### **Romans 5:1-8**

But, according to the BBC, 71% of the U.S. is Christian so why is there a shortage of laborers? But, that survey also indicated that in 2004 78% claimed they were Christian and the number of non-Christians grew from 16% to 23%; that means that nearly one-fourth of our nation is not Christian. Does that alarm anyone? Probably not, we'll just be content to let things go on. It's just too hard to get the message out. Besides, I don't want to get hassled and rejected and challenged by those who don't believe as I do. Besides, religion is supposed to make me feel good, not make me feel uncomfortable. But, Paul didn't think like I do. He saw the lonely and hopeless people and told them about his God who gave him a peace because he had a hope in a God who loved him. He was able to endure suffering and, as he wrote to the Romans, he knew, "... that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." Paul knew that religion wasn't about making people good. The Christian faith is about people knowing they are loved. That's why Paul wrote, "But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." God took the first step and showed us that God loves us.

### **The Call and the Challenge**

I don't know how many of you have been in love. When I first had a crush on Marilyn, it took a lot of courage for me to even talk to her. And, she was so blind that she didn't know how much I cared for her. Every time I tried to talk to her, it seemed like something distracted her. But, finally when I took the first step, it seemed so natural. Oh, there were ups and downs but, when we knew we were in love, even the difficulties were smoothed over. I think that's how it is with God's love. God loves us so much but we keep getting distracted but God has taken the first and most difficult step. God has told us he loves us. Maybe that's what we Christians have got to learn. First, though, do we love the people out there who are harassed and helpless and hopeless? Do we really love them? If we do, maybe we've got to take the first step. Maybe they will be distracted by the cares of the world. Maybe they'll reject us. But, if we love them, we will pursue them. It'll be easy to get discouraged. But, because I loved Marilyn, I kept pursuing her. If we really love those lonely people and they see our love is genuine, they will want to have what we have. Hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which Christ has given us... It won't be easy but it will be worth it!