

First Presbyterian Church
Greenfield, Indiana
Pastor John J. Paulson

September 4, 2011

Labor Day Weekend

Ready?

Exodus 12:1-14 God institutes the Passover
Psalm 149:1-9 God delights in us!
Matthew 18:15-20 Two Christians together? Jesus is there!
Romans 13:8-14 Are you ready for Jesus to come?

Informally before the sermon: *Are you ready? Of course, you may ask, how can I be ready when I don't know what to be ready for? Being ready for us today,*

...might mean are we ready for the celebration of Holy Communion. Are the cups full? Is there bread or wafers? Did the liturgist line up Communion servers? Did I prepare a "Great Thanksgiving" prayer? Are we spiritually prepared to meet Jesus at this table this morning? Do we truly accept God's forgiveness?

...might mean are we ready to celebrate Labor day? Did we buy the stuff we need for our picnic? Did we plan on where to get ice for the cooler? Is there gas for the boat's motor? Is the picnic basket still on the garage shelf, or, do we even remember where we put the picnic basket last time we used it?

For the chosen people whose story we have been following, being ready on this fateful, terrible night in Egypt, means following God's directions exactly, marking their houses as instructed by God, eating a special meal, and being prepared to move in the middle of the night when the Pharaoh finally lets them go. Being ready means that they have made peace with God?

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O LORD, our Rock and our Redeemer! Amen

Come along with me back to Egypt this morning, to the bottom of this hill. You all remember Moses and his brother Aaron. Well, this is the spot where God normally speaks with Moses and his brother Aaron. In fact, if you look up, you can see them on the hillside; they may even be talking to God right now.

But wait, turn your eyes to the countryside around us. Something is not right. Something has been going on. Look at the Egyptians; they look devastated. Look at their houses and market place stalls; they all have major holes in their roofs. And the fields that should be ripe with wheat and corn; the fields are barren; and look there, I can't even count the number of dead cattle and other animal carcasses lying around.

What has been going on? Let's ask this Egyptian woman over here.

"Can you tell us what has happened here?"

Let me tell you. These last few weeks have been absolutely miserable. That man Moses is having some sort of a battle with Pharaoh. Moses wants Pharaoh to set the Hebrew slaves free. Can you believe that! That would really be a disaster! These Hebrews do our building, keep the latrine trenches open, repair our roads, wash our clothes, and take care of our children. I don't think Pharaoh will ever give in to Moses and his God. I hope he won't. Pharaoh is a strong and wonderful leader.

You know, Moses claims that his God has caused everything that has happened. I don't believe it. We have just had some awful bad luck with the weather and insects recently.

Yes, I can see that things don't look good. Have you had bad storms or did a typhoon go through the land? What is going on? We have heard that a man named Moses has taken over the leadership on the Hebrew slaves in the country. But we know little about what has been happening.

Well, I have heard that Pharaoh is playing a game with Moses! Let me tell you about it. One morning we woke up and all the water in the country had turned red, it looked like blood. We couldn't drink it or use it for cooking or anything. It was really strange. The next day the news crier reported that Moses came to Nile river where the Pharaoh was bathing, and he was carrying a long wooden staff. He stood before Pharaoh and said: "The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the desert. But until now you have not listened. This is what the Lord says: By this you will know that I am the Lord: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood. The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water.'

When Pharaoh laughed in Moses' face, Moses took his staff and struck the water and it turned red. The fish did die, and as I said, we couldn't drink the water, but, Pharaoh's magicians said they could do the same thing with their magic. So, Pharaoh wasn't tricked by Moses! He knew what to do. He ordered the people to dig wells alongside the river, and we had plenty of fresh water. Pharaoh went into the palace laughing all the way.

I'm not glad that Pharaoh was laughing about the trouble with the water, but I am glad to hear that you did get fresh water. What happened next? Did Moses give up?

A week later Moses came to the palace again and confronted Pharaoh. "This is what the Lord says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. If you refuse to let them go, I will plague your whole country with frogs. The Nile will teem with frogs. They will come up into your palace and your bedroom and onto your bed, into the houses of your officials and on your people, and into your ovens and kneading troughs. The frogs will go up on you and your people and all your officials."

And the frogs came. You can imagine what it was like to have frogs all over everything. My wife and I were awakened by a bed full of frogs! And when we put our feet on the floor, we stepped on frogs! It was sickening, I tell you, it was sickening. They were all slimy and the noise from their croaking was deafening. It was worse than the annual cicada outburst. But we knew that Pharaoh would take care of it, and he did.

What did Pharaoh do?

We heard that Pharaoh called Moses to the palace and made a deal. At least Moses thought he was making a deal. Pharaoh said: "Pray to the Lord to take the frogs away from me and my people, and I will let your people go to offer sacrifices to the Lord." Moses agreed that God would end the frog attack, and Pharaoh would let the slaves leave the country the next day.

Well, as we expected, the frog epidemic died out naturally, and our lives got back to normal. Not much is going to stop us Egyptians!

Of course Pharaoh didn't fall for Moses' shenanigans, and the slaves continue to work for us, where they belong.

What about the Israelites? These plagues had to have been hard on them. How did they handle it?

They didn't have any problem. You know they live in the Goshen region. And there is a strong westerly wind that always blows in Goshen. It was strong enough to keep them safe. They were lucky. And, since they didn't suffer, they could continue to work for us.

Then we had a really strange series of weird natural events.

One afternoon, when my wife and I were relaxing outside of our house, we were surrounded by gnats. If you have ever been outside when the gnats are active where you live, you know how annoying they can be. These were not just gnats that flew by once in a while; these were gnats that were just like the dust on the ground and in the air. They were everywhere! Our lamb kabobs and lentil stew were

covered with gnats. We couldn't eat them. There were gnats everywhere until the next afternoon when Pharaoh stopped them. Moses thinks his God has power. Huh! All it takes is a word from Pharaoh and the gnats went away. Pharaoh told Moses that the slaves could go, and suddenly, the gnats went away! Just a word from Pharaoh was all it took. I can still see Pharaoh laughing in Moses' face. Our king is smart and knows everything. Pharaoh is smarter than any "god"! I feel sorry for Moses. He is a real loser! So is his "god!"

That still doesn't explain the dead livestock or the damage to the houses and marketplace stalls. Did something else happen?

Yes it did. There were more of these plagues as we began to call them. In fact six more times Pharaoh continued to play this game with Moses. Something happens, then Pharaoh promises to let the people go; the plague ends, as we knew it would, and Pharaoh tells Moses that he changed his mind. Of course Moses was furious, but he found out that his God is no match for our Pharaoh!

Well, what happened then?

After the gnats came flies that covered everything from the family pet dog to the food on the table. Of course Pharaoh stood his ground, and the flies went away.

Then some strange animal disease struck all the animals in the country; all our horses and donkeys and camels and along with our cattle and sheep and goats were infected by a deadly disease, and all of them died. Still, we held the slaves where they belonged.

Then all of us were infected with boils, even my three month old son. All of our neighbors, as well as the Pharaoh and his whole household were infected. I think it was something in the air from a volcano that was erupting in Pompeii. But Pharaoh stayed strong. He still said no.

The next week we had the most ferocious hail storm that ever hit the country. That storm stripped the trees bare and broke down all the crops in the fields. Of course it stopped as soon as Pharaoh tricked Moses once again. All these plagues stopped in two or three days as we expected them to. Of course, God had nothing to do with them.

Next we had locusts everywhere. They were eating whatever crops were left and the ground was covered with locusts. Every step we took was "crunch, crunch, crunch". Of course when they had eaten their fill, the locusts disappeared. We love our Pharaoh!

Then there was an eclipse of the sun that lasted three days, a bit longer than usual. Of course Pharaoh didn't budge. He knows how much Egypt needs the Hebrews. Our economy would suffer incredible losses if they were set free. We would be facing a major economic disaster, a major depression. Our entire economy depends on the Hebrews. If we lost them it would be a real disaster!

Well, thank you for talking to us. We always wondered what the Egyptian people thought about what was going on. I love your little baby. What is his name?

We call him Alim, that means wise in our language. He will be a very wise man when he grows up. You know he is our firstborn and we love him so much. He will have a wonderful future in Egypt.

Thank you again. Look, here come Moses and Aaron down from the mountain.

Moses, would you share with us what God said to you this morning?

Just a minute. I'm almost in shock. I need a moment or two to catch my breath. What God is doing tonight is unbelievable! God is going to kill all the first born of the Egyptians. every single one of them. From the Pharaoh to the servants, after God goes through the country tonight, all the first born children of the Egyptians will die. I can hardly believe that it will take this to get Pharaoh to let our people go. But, God is pretty sure that this will finally do it. God told us what to do so that none of our people will suffer. You know, in all the past few weeks, none of God's chosen people have suffered. They always had fresh water to drink and to cook with; the gnats, flies, locusts and animal diseases passed them by. So did all the other problems. God is amazing!

Yes, I have to agree with you on that, Moses. God is amazing, and you have just seen the beginning of what God can and will do in the world. There is a saying from my time that goes, "you ain't seen nothing yet!" Moses, you ain't seen nothing yet!

AMEN