

# PENTECOST 15

## Proper 18 - Year A

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### Exodus 12:1-14

12 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, <sup>2</sup>“This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. <sup>3</sup>Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. <sup>4</sup>If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. <sup>5</sup>Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. <sup>6</sup>You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. <sup>7</sup>They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. <sup>8</sup>They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. <sup>9</sup>Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. <sup>10</sup>You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn with fire. <sup>11</sup>This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand, and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the Passover of the Lord. <sup>12</sup>I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, from human to animal, and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. <sup>13</sup>The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

<sup>14</sup>“This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

### Commentary from Angela Furlong

Social justice. If one were to place the Book of Exodus into a literary category, the category of social justice might fit. In fact, the Bible in its entirety might well fit into that category. Social justice literature explores social issues, their histories, their impacts, and their resolutions, both possible and realized.

This reading from Exodus is widely recognized as the institution of the Passover feast, a ritual that honors the liberation of the Israelites from slavery. It is celebrated annually, but its meaning and purpose root it deeply into everyday life—not just for the ancient Israelites, but for contemporary readers, as well. This excerpt from Exodus can be seen as disaster preparedness for salvation. A religious “go-bag” for any earthly exodus. Inside this go-bag are essentials for survival and sustenance: the blood of an unblemished sacrificial lamb (one innocent sacrificed for many), unleavened bread (indicative of the focus on urgency), and bitter herbs (representing the bitter taste of bondage). The flesh of the lamb is to be roasted over a fire, symbolically enduring the flames of iniquity, and consumed with haste by mouth or flame. None is to be left by morning. Participants are to engage in this ritual fully dressed and ready to go—loins girded, shoes on, staff in hand.

This go-bag concept can readily be illustrated through a contemporary disaster for which one must be prepared to quickly exit at a moment's notice—wildfires. And it can be applied to contemporary social justice issues like poverty, racism, and prejudice:

- The alarm sounds (The Lord speaks to Moses; FEMA issues an evacuation notice; NIH illuminates the impacts of structural racism on food and housing insecurity)
- The people grab their go-bags (Passover ritual; Disaster Preparedness Kits; social action agendas)
- They follow a prescribed route to safety (out of Egypt; out of the fire zone; out of injustice).

The people are freed from the bondage of disaster, and the journey to safety—to salvation—is not an easy one. One is not likely to survive unscathed. The bitterness of

disaster is a stark reminder of the injustices we face as fallible creatures subject to one another's actions, and the sweet taste of freedom is a hope-filled sign of God's love for us and God's desire that we not only survive but thrive.

God desires justice. The Book of Exodus is about social justice—about disaster preparedness—and today's Passover reading serves as a go-bag for salvation and justice. May we perpetually be present, aware, and prepared to go with God toward liberation and justice.

### **Discussion Question**

Can you think of a social justice issue for which you might prepare a go-bag? What might you place in it?

## Psalm 149

- <sup>1</sup> Hallelujah!  
Sing to the Lord a new song; \*  
sing his praise in the congregation of the faithful.
- <sup>2</sup> Let Israel rejoice in his Maker; \*  
let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.
- <sup>3</sup> Let them praise his Name in the dance; \*  
let them sing praise to him with timbrel and harp.
- <sup>4</sup> For the Lord takes pleasure in his people \*  
and adorns the poor with victory.
- <sup>5</sup> Let the faithful rejoice in triumph; \*  
let them be joyful on their beds.
- <sup>6</sup> Let the praises of God be in their throat \*  
and a two-edged sword in their hand;
- <sup>7</sup> To wreak vengeance on the nations \*  
and punishment on the peoples;
- <sup>8</sup> To bind their kings in chains \*  
and their nobles with links of iron;
- <sup>9</sup> To inflict on them the judgment decreed; \*  
this is glory for all his faithful people.  
Hallelujah!

### Commentary from Angela Furlong

Living in an area prone to wildfires, one becomes accustomed to having a go-bag packed and ready. At a moment's notice, a prepared person can grab their go-bag and go, increasing their chances of surviving a wildfire or any number of other disasters. One thing that is good to have in a go-bag is a journal. Journaling is a very useful tool for remembering details, processing emotions, and chronicling experiences.

Thinking back to our Old Testament reading today from the Book of Exodus, and the preparation of go-bags for social justice, the psalms might readily be considered a disaster-preparedness journal, chronicling the good, the not-so-good, and the downright ugly experiences and emotions of the ancient Hebrew people as they navigated their way through the wilderness toward God and toward justice. Psalm 149 is no exception. It is replete with poetic praise, joyful song, and what appears to be vengeful prose. As unsettling as the vengeful language here may seem, perhaps it is simply language used to best express the ancient Hebrews' recognition of God's almighty power above all to love and to save—to attain justice. Or perhaps the writers actually felt vengeful.

If we read Psalm 149 as a journal entry amid an anthology of journal entries that authentically illustrate the human struggle through hardships and discernment, we might empathize and even relate to their experiences—their praises *and* their desire for vengeance. It can be a tough thing to admit to feelings of anger and vengeance when afflicted by woundedness and grief—tough, but very human. The psalmists, like us, were fallible and imperfect. *And* they were faithful.

### Discussion Question

Journaling is an effective method for expressing and processing strong emotions. It can be a healthful and spiritual practice. Can you recall an experience in your life that kindled strong emotions? If you were to write a psalm as though it were a journal entry of that experience, how might you express yourself? How might you tell your story?

## Romans 13:8-14

<sup>8</sup> Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup> The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

<sup>11</sup> Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is already the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; <sup>12</sup> the night is far gone; the day is near. Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; <sup>13</sup> let us walk decently as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in illicit sex and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy.

<sup>14</sup> Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

### Commentary from Angela Furlong

It is important to recognize the context within which Paul wrote this letter to the Romans. Paul believed that Christ's return was imminent and that the time left to embrace Christ as Savior was fleeting. Paul's mission ahead of Christ's return was not only to bring as many people as possible to faith in Christ but also to promote Jesus' singular, most important commandment—a commandment he himself lived by: to love.

St. Augustine once said, “Let the root of love be in you: nothing can spring from it but good.” That is what Paul is conveying in his letter to the Romans. If everything we do is based upon love, then all of God's commandments will be fulfilled. And when Paul tells the Romans to put on the armor of light, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, he is telling them to be the face of Christ in the world. Live by his example. Love by his example. Paul's message speaks to us today, as well. Every moment is precious and, while no one knows precisely when Christ will return, time is still fleeting.

### Discussion Question

Paul faced tremendous persecution and hardship, yet he allowed love to remain the root of his words and actions. Can you think of a time when you allowed love to be the root of your words and actions, even in the face of opposition?

## Matthew 18:15-20

<sup>15</sup> “If your brother or sister sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If you are listened to, you have regained that one. <sup>16</sup> But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If that person refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church, and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a gentile and a tax collector. <sup>18</sup> Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup> Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

### Commentary from Angela Furlong

“Go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the offender refuses to listen... let such a one be to you as a gentile and a tax collector.” On the surface, this passage may appear to be dismissive of Gentiles and tax collectors, but in fact, it is not. On the contrary, it is actually a portent for love and forgiveness. To treat an offender like a Gentile or a tax collector is to *love* them. It is to be the face of Christ in the world and to forgive.

Christ set the ultimate example of love and forgiveness. To love and forgive someone does not mean that there is no pain or anger or sense of loss and disappointment. It does not mean that you condone the offender’s actions, either. It means that you are acknowledging not only the person’s existence as a beloved creature of God but also God’s sole authority as judge—as Savior and Redeemer. You are acknowledging your shared existence as sinners. Forgiveness means you are liberating yourself from the bondage of loathing and resentment. An oft-used metaphor says it best: Forgiveness is the fragrance that flowers give when they are crushed. May you recognize the sweet fragrance of forgiveness even in the bitterest of pains.

### Discussion Questions

Wounds can be especially painful when they are inflicted by another member of the church. Can you think of a time when you have been wounded by a fellow Christian? What role did love and forgiveness play in how you processed that pain? Were you able to loose yourself from the bondage of resentment and loathing?