

God Stooping – To Us

Exodus 19:2-8, Romans 5:6-II, Matthew 9:35-10:4
Second Sunday after Pentecost – June 18, 2017

Brothers and sisters, our God is a God who always keeps his promises! Therefore at the beginning of our Old Testament lesson today, God is fulfilling yet another great promise that he had made to Moses. God had promised Moses—that once he had gone to free his chosen people from their bondage to slavery in Egypt that he, the LORD God, would bring BOTH Moses and these newly-liberated Israelites back to Mount Sinai to fellowship with them there.

Practically speaking, even from a human perspective, Moses was the logical choice for the LORD God to send on that very vital mission. After all Moses had grown up in the Pharaoh's palace! Therefore, Moses was just as fluent at speaking the Egyptian language as he was in Hebrew!

On the day that when Moses finally consented to take on this tough assignment, the LORD God promised him: *"I will be with you and this shall be a sign for you! When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve me once more on this mountain" (Exodus 3:12)!*

And so here Moses is—with his mission accomplished—and with the people of Israel right there by his side! After three long months of their arduous trekking through the wilderness—they now have arrived—safely at the foot of Mount Sinai in the Arabian Peninsula!

Once there, Moses climbs that mountain to converse with the LORD God Almighty—and while there—GOD GIVES HIM A POWERFUL MESSAGE TO SHARE WITH HIS RANSOMED PEOPLE: *"Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I have done to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself'" (Exodus 19:4)!*

Here the LORD God reminds his chosen people of what he has done for them! God had subdued the mighty grip that the Egyptians had on them, but even better, God rescued them in a way that only God himself could rescue them! What beautiful imagery we find here: *"I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself!"*

Brothers and sisters, let's not forget that if the Carolina Wren is our state bird here in the South Carolina—that the bald eagle is our national bird! Though a bird of prey, the eagle is used as a symbol for God all throughout the Bible. In the Book of Ezekiel, God is represented by the face of an eagle! In the fourth chapter of Revelation, God is pictured by a flying eagle.

The eagle is seen and admired for its strength and its ability to soar to the heights. It can swoop down so beautifully from the highest point in the sky – as though its flight-pattern was choreographed. It is the king of birds; so much so that someone has given the eagle the nomenclature of being the "jet plane of the bird family!" So, there is great beauty in the metaphor of Israel's being born on eagle's wings; held aloft by God's grace, carried by him safely out of the bony hands of death back in Egypt.

When it comes to raising their young, at a certain stage in the development of these baby birds, the parent-eagles break up their babies' comfortable nest and force the eagles to fly. Even though the young birds may not be ready to leave the security of their nest, they must leave the nest if they are ever going to learn how to fly! When soaring through the air, therefore, the adult

birds stay near the fledglings and if they fall, the parent eagles—swoop down beneath them—and carry them on their own strong wings—until the young birds learn how to soar through the air on the power of their own wings and how to ride on the air currents—and therefore—enjoy the abilities which their Creator has given to them!

Please note those wonderful words of the LORD God that Moses was to speak on God's behalf to the children of Israel: *"I bore you on eagles' wings and I brought you to myself!"* God's goal through Moses was to bring his chosen people closer to himself.

But there was also a second pronouncement that God wanted Moses to speak to the newly-liberated children of Israel on his behalf: *"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation! These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel"* (Vv. 5-6)!

God obviously intended for his personal relationship with the people of Israel to grow. So in the very next verse following our Old Testament lesson today we read: *"The LORD said to Moses: "Behold, I am coming down in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe you forever" (v. 9)!"*

Here God was saying to Moses that when he would visit his people, they would actually see something of his glory! For he promised: *"I am coming down in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe you forever" (v. 9)!"*

Please notice that God would have to "come down" to do this! The LORD God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was not like the pagan gods of the Romans and the Greeks who lived on Mount Olympus! He did not dwell there on Mount Sinai as his permanent place of residence! He only came down there at times for a visit!

Whenever God visits his people—it is always a "coming down" type of experience.

The Prophet Nehemiah would later say: *"You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven (Nehemiah 9:13)!"* This shows God's distance, or transcendence. He is separate and other. If he were not willing to stoop down and visit us, we would never be able to see him or talk to him! -- But God is willing to stoop! He is immanent as well as transcendent. He says to us in Isaiah 57:15, *"I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit!"*

The whole story of God's salvation is about God stooping down to save us! In the beginning, he walked and talked daily with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Sadly, as St Paul reminds us in our epistle lesson today, our first parents sinned and thus they forfeited the opportunity to have an immediate and direct experience with him in their lives!

Yet because of his great love, God has been reaching out ever since to restore all of humanity in a right relationship with him! This is why he sent his only-begotten Son into our world—so that he could come down here—and be very close to us! After all, once again, his name is "Immanuel," which means "God with us" (Matthew 1:23)!

Brothers and sisters, the Bible teaches us that immediately after the LORD God gave his people the Ten Commandments—their immediate response was—as we read in our last verse of the Old Testament lesson today: *"All that the Lord has spoken we will do! And Moses reported these words of the people to the Lord!"*

It wasn't long after this, however, that Moses went back up on Mount Sinai to speak with the LORD God personally, that Moses came down from heaven to see and to experience firsthand—that these people—who had made such a powerful promise to God—had melded together all of their gold jewelry—and shaped it into the form of a golden calf—a golden calf around which they were all dancing and worshiping!

As a child in Sunday school I often wondered how in the world anyone could be so foolish as to worship a God of their own making—and yet—in thousands of ways—we all do the same thing ourselves at time!

The good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ today is set forth for us so beautifully in our epistle lesson today (Romans 5:6-11). *“For, while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly! For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us! Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God!”*

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life! More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation!”

Friends, God not only sent Moses to free the people of Israel from their bondage to slavery, but also because he had a special assignment for them. God said to the Israelites: *“You shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6)!*

God wanted the Israelites to become his “kingdom of priests” and a priest—simply enough—was a human being who could serve as a “GO-BETWEEN,” or as a mediator, between God and people! A priest would teach other people what he knew to be the revealed Word of God—so that the people—in turn could share that information with other people!

This is the first time that the Bible speaks to us about “The Priesthood of All Believers,” and yet St. Peter teaches us in the New Testament that God does the same thing for us whom he has called and gathered together to become the Church!” In I Peter 2:9, Peter says: *“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people—that you may declare the deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (I Peter 2:9!).*

Today is Father’s Day and sometimes fathers have sons who highly resemble them! They hear such things as: “I can sure tell that you are your father’s son!” -- But today, God our Heavenly Father is teaching us that even though we are his children, what he really wants is for us to resemble our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, both with our hands, and our hearts, with our attitudes and our actions! On the night before Jesus went to the cross, he washed his disciples’ feet (John 13:12-15). And then Jesus sat down with them and said: *“Do you know what I have done for you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say this rightly, for so I am. But if I your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also out to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example! You should do, as I have done!”*

Brothers and sisters God not only wants us to do what Jesus did, and to love like Jesus loved and to live like Jesus lived. God wants us to see as Jesus saw! *“When Jesus saw the crowd,” Matthew tells us, “he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36)!*

Since today is Father's Day I would like to close my message by sharing with you a little message about this one particular father and his son living—way back—in the 1970s.

A young boy had just gotten his driving permit. He asked his father, who was a minister, if they could discuss the use of the car. His father took him to his study and said to him, "I'll make a deal with you. You bring your grades up, study your Bible a little and get your hair cut and we'll talk about it."

After about a month, the boy came back and again asked his father, if they could discuss use of the car. They again went to the father's study where his father said, "Son, I've been real proud of you. You have brought your grades up, you've studied your Bible diligently, but you didn't get your hair cut."

The young man waited for a moment and replied, "You know Dad, I've been thinking about that. You know, Samson had long hair, Moses had long hair, Noah had long hair, and even Jesus had long hair!" to which his father replied, "Yes, you're right, and they also WALKED everywhere they went!"