

Sermon for Sunday 13 September 2020 @ Bethesda UMC

Scriptures: Exodus 14:19-31; Canticle of Moses and Miriam (Cantemus Domino) (UMH p. 135); Romans 14:1-12; Matthew 18:21-35

*"Why?"*

What do you see coming out of all this trouble we're in?

Do you see healing? Patience? A revolution?

Have we got the secret? Or does somebody else, somebody we're not listening to, not willing to hear yet?

We can't say God's run out of patience ... that's not our religion.

If it's forgiveness, do we know how to do that?

Today's scripture's not very hopeful about that. Moses and Miriam sing and dance ... but that's because they won. Wait awhile and watch what they do when new trouble comes up. And the generous master: What did he get for being forgiving? Just another fight between slaves, one of whom he'd just bent over backwards to avoid giving what the slave himself truly deserved.

Paul says we should be sure where we stand, and stick to it ... but get along. How do you work that out with two-year-olds, or thirty-year-olds, or eighty-year-olds, for that matter?

We come together for encouragement ... and then we praise God... or is it the other way around? Do we start with praise? Do the words and acts handed down to us from long ago actually train us to do the right thing, little by little, two or three at a time, getting to know one another in the light of God's ideas?

A few weeks back we had Matthew reminding us we'd better be ready, the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected time. We also know, as commentator Fred Craddock says, that "Christian behavior does not flow from the belief that the end is near but from the belief that God is near. All else is secondary."

Without any fancy talk, we center down on this and start coming to life. Every Sunday. Looking back on it, it's hard to be certain which were the good days and which were the bad days. We learned from both.

Little by little and love by love, the story weaves its way through history ... human history, and our personal history. When did I learn to trust a little more? When did I actually let go of some grudge or regret? It just seemed to happen as I went along.

Why is it like this?

Wait a minute. Whose voice is that?

I'm asking God ... and yet it seems like God is asking me: "Why did you...? I laid out all these plans, and you ..." Did I walk right by without so much as a glance? Has there always been more than I was ready or willing to receive?

Time after time, some pearl of great price lies in our path. Sometimes we're able to see and pick it up; other times, not so likely.

These wildfires out west remind us of global warming. Congress's incapacity to agree discourages everybody. We count the ways we're falling apart. It's really, really bad.

The Word is among us, the Presence is within us. We learn, and pray, and walk close together even as we tend our separate gardens and respect each other's boundaries.

All things work together ...

This is our time to live that and breathe it, moment by moment, inside and outside, never, ever without the Love who is both the question and the answer.

I love you. I am with you. Come to me. Walk with me. Show that you know me.

We are all one in Christ Jesus.

Amen.