**June 14, 2020 Exodus 19:2-8a**

 ***A Treasured Possession***

**Scripture:** Exodus 19:2-8a NRSV

 *(2)They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. (3)Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: (4)You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. (5)Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, (6)but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites." (7)So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. (8a)The people all answered as one: "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do."*

**Notes:**

1. *Israel* *camped there in front of* ***THE*** *mountain.*
	1. Invite ***all*** people into a redemptive relationship with ***God***.
	2. God wanted a special nation to ***represent*** his way of life, to ***teach*** his Word, to be an ***agent*** of salvation.
2. The Lord has brought us out of our ***bondage***.
	1. A call to be a kingdom of ***priests***.
	2. To faithfully carry out their calling Israel would need to walk in God’s ***ways***.
3. Are we faithful in our calling, to be the ***church***,
	1. The Lord considers His people to be a ***treasure***.
	2. You are ***bought*** with great price, Christ’s holy blood.
	3. Through ***Christ*** the blessing comes to all peoples.
4. What do ***priests*** do?
	1. First, we ***offer*** up sacrifices.
	2. Second, as priests we ***intercede*** for others in prayer.
	3. And third, ***proclaiming*** God’s word.
5. All of us can give a good ***witness*** to others of our Savior.
	1. He ***commissioned*** you to make disciples of all nations.
	2. We are God’s ***treasured*** ***possession***.
	3. ***Share*** the story of God’s love.

**Transcript:**

I had to answer a few questions before I was able to start writing this message today. And I have to admit it was not an easy question to answer. It wasn’t easy because how I answer it reflects upon my attitudes, reflects upon my beliefs, reflects upon who I am as an individual. The answer was not easy for me, but for many it may be very easy.

How do I know that I am loved? I feel the warmth in my heart when I am with that person; I desire to do whatever it is that pleases them. How do I know that I am special in the eyes of those whom I desire to be special to? I can hear it in their voice as they talk to me; I fear losing the intimacy that we share; I can see the look on their face that tells me I am loved. How do I know that I am doing what I need to do in order to honor such affection? Now that is a tough question.

How do you know that you are loved? Can you hear it? Can you see it? Can you feel it? What is there in the relationship between you and another that tells you that you are loved and that you love them in return?

Well today we are traveling back in time to the time of Moses. And we are privileged to be witness to instruction from God to Moses; and instruction from Moses to the people of Israel; as well as their response. Turn with me this morning in your bibles to Exodus 19:2-8a and stand with me as we share in the reading of God’s word.

***Exodus 19:2-8a NRSV****(2)They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. (3)Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: (4)You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. (5)Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, (6)but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites." (7)So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. (8a)The people all answered as one: "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do."*

“*Israel camped there in front of the Mountain.*” The first thing we need to understand is that they are camping in a very special place. The passage doesn’t say they camped there in front of a mountain; but that they *“…camped there in front of [THE] mountain.”* What mountain are they in front of? Mount Sinai, they are camping in front of Mount Sinai. This mountain is where Moses met God in a burning bush, this is where God will give his people the laws and guidelines for right living. This is where Elijah heard God in the gentle whisper. And today, this is where we see God making his covenant with Israel, a place where they will learn the potential blessings of obedience and the tragic consequences of disobedience. Mount Sinai is one of the most sacred locations in Israel's history.

God had instructed Moses to go and free his Israelite brothers and sisters who were enslaved in Egypt. So, Moses went and did as he was told and now after near three months of traveling, they are encamped here in front of the Holy Mountain; God is now going to reveal his desires for Israel.

God had a reason for rescuing the Israelites from slavery. Now he was ready to tell them what it was: Israel was to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation where anyone could approach God freely. In other words, God wanted the Israelites to be the ones; the ones to invite all the people of the world back into a redemptive relationship with God. Nobody who is willing would be turned away; nobody is so far gone that they could not be brought back, they could all be saved. God wanted Israel to be the ones to bring the world back to him.

So, God explains to Moses what to say. “Moses remind the people what I did to the Egyptians; Remember the plagues upon Egypt, remember the Passover, remember how I led you out of their captivity, remember how I led you to the Red Sea, remember how I opened the waters and led you through on dry ground, and remember how I destroyed the Pharaoh’s army as they pursued you in the sea; remember how I lifted you up as on wings of eagles and brought you here to myself.”

God goes on to say, “*Therefore*,” because of what I have done, for this reason; “if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession. …you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation…”

God knew that no nation on earth was good enough to deserve to be called his people, but in love and mercy, God chose Israel. Not because of anything that they may have done, but in spite of the wrong the nation had and would do.

Remember the covenant that God made with Abraham, It is being realized here in this meeting as God restates to the Israelites, Abraham’s descendants God restates the agreement he made with Abraham, So Moses presents these words and this covenant to the people And the people responded, “*Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do*.” With that, the covenant was sealed.

Why did God want to have a special nation on earth to begin with? God wanted a special nation to represent his way of life, God wanted a special nation to teach his Word, God wanted a special nation to be an agent of salvation to the world. He had a History with the Israelites; first with Abraham, then with Isaac, then with Jacob whose name would later become Israel, then to Joseph, down through the years even until Moses; this family seemed to be the logical choice.

God is still working to have a chosen people, a priestly kingdom, and a holy nation. So, it is for us; the Lord has brought us out of our bondage, our slavery to sin and death. The blood of Christ, our Passover Lamb, marks our doorpost, and we are spared from eternal death. Jesus has defeated all our foes: sin, death, the devil, hell. A mighty rescue indeed! All by grace, all God’s doing.

As for Israel, so also for us: The call to be a kingdom of priests, in service to the Lord, follows upon God first setting us free and bringing us to himself. How the Lord has carried us to where we are today! His protection, his provision, they have guarded and guided us through many dangers to this point. The Holy Spirit has kept us in the one true faith, starting in our baptism, and here we are today: the church, ready to hear the Lord’s calling.

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant...” Now let us hear this word correctly. Israel was already God’s people. The Lord had done the work of making them his people. It’s not as though they had to earn their way in. No, they were already in. But to faithfully carry out their calling as God’s people, they would need to listen closely to his voice. They would need to walk in his ways. If they strayed, if they failed to listen to the Lord’s voice, if they turned aside, then they could not be doing what they were meant to do, they could not be who they were meant to be: a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

So, it is for us. Are we going to be faithful in our calling, to be the church, to be God’s holy people, set apart to belong to him and do his will? Are we going to be intentional and cognizant about being a kingdom of priests, dedicated to the Lord’s service? Then we need to hear God’s word, take it in, faithfully, regularly. We need to be built up by the means of grace, here in the church, here at this holy mountain, the place of God’s dwelling. This is the way to be God’s people and to carry out our calling.

The Lord says to Israel and to us: “You shall be my treasured possession.” Isn’t that the word we have longed to hear our entire life, that we are treasured? The Lord considers his people to be a treasure that he possesses. not that we are so special or wonderful in and of ourselves. Certainly, Israel was not. They constantly were disobeying him, failing to listen, grumbling and complaining, not fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things. It wasn’t their innate goodness that the Lord called them his treasured possession. And we are no better. How often have we stumbled and strayed, grumbled and griped, falling back into the old ways, the ways of the world. It’s not because of our own goodness that God calls us his treasured possession.

No, it’s because of the great price that God paid to make us his own! It took the holy precious blood of God’s own Son to rescue and redeem us. What greater price could there be? Jesus himself is the priceless treasure by which we become God’s treasured possession. You are bought with a price, the price of Christ’s holy blood.

“*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*.” Here we’re getting at what it means to be a kingdom of priests. The whole earth is the Lord’s, but he chose one people out of all the nations to be his priestly people, dedicated to his service, to be his servant to all the other nations of the world. That was Israel’s calling. Through Israel, the Lord would bring blessing to all the nations. Ultimately, of course, this would be fulfilled in Christ, A descendant of Abraham, Israel reduced to one, because through Christ the blessing does come to all peoples. Israel had a calling to be the instrument of God’s blessing in the world.

So, it is now for the church. We are blessed, not just to keep the blessing to ourselves, but to share it with others. We are a priestly people, a kingdom of priests. At this point we should ask: What do priests do? What did the priests do within Old Testament Israel? They were dedicated to the Lord’s service. The Levitical priesthood was set apart to serve the rest of the people of Israel. The Lord says that the whole nation of Israel has the calling of being a kingdom of priests, he’s saying that the people as a whole, all of them together, have that duty in relation to the world. That was their priestly vocation. It was true for Israel, and it’s true for us as the church.

Within Israel, the service of priests consisted primarily of several things: They offered up sacrifices. They interceded in prayer. And they proclaimed the word of the Lord. And that’s what we do also as a kingdom of priests.

First, we offer up sacrifices. Now here we need to be clear. There is one sacrifice we can never make, and that is the sacrifice for sin. We cannot atone for our own sin or for the sins of others. No, that sacrifice is beyond our ability, but has already been made! Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world he has made the sacrifice; His is the atoning sacrifice that puts us right with God. But now that we are right with God, we do offer up priestly sacrifices. This is the sacrifice of praise, the worship of our lips and our lives. Romans 12: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” So, we offer up sacrifices to God, in lives dedicated to God’s service.

Second, as priests we intercede for others in prayer. We do this here in our service, don’t we, specifically, the prayers of the Church. We pray for the church at large, for the government, for people in need–all sorts of people and needs that we’re praying for. And you pray this way in your daily prayers too, bringing the needs of others before God’s throne of grace. That is the priestly service of intercessory prayer.

Offering up sacrifices. Interceding in prayer. And third, proclaiming God’s word. Yes, we have persons, ordained servants of the word, who preach and teach publicly. And not all Christians are called to do that. But we all can do priestly service by sharing God’s word with others. Certainly parents, when you teach your children at home, are doing that. and our Sunday school and small group leaders fulfill this vocation.

But all of us, whatever our situation, can give a good witness to others of our Savior. Personal evangelism, witnessing–whatever you want to call it, we all can do it. So let’s prepare ourselves to be more effective witnesses for Christ.

You have friends, relatives, associates, neighbors, people you know in your network of relationships, people who may not know the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. And you might be just the person God will use to bring the good news to them. 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.” When you knelt in prayer and asked the Lord to come into your life; He came and freely gave you the forgiveness you sought. He adopted you into His family, making you a joint heir with Jesus, And he commissioned you to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, son and holy spirit teaching them what you have been taught about the Lord encouraging them along the way.

You know, Peter picks up on this language in his epistle, when he applies it to the church. [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Pet%202.9): “*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light*.” Martin Luther said of this passage: “We are all priests… so that all of us should proclaim God’s Word and works at every time and in every place.”

So, both for Old Testament Israel and for the New Testament church, that’s who we are: We are a kingdom of priests. We are God’s treasured possession, bought with the price of Christ’s holy blood. We are a holy nation, set apart to belong to God alone, who has rescued and redeemed us to be his people.

We are a kingdom of priests, dedicated to God’s service with a high and holy calling: to offer up a living sacrifice of praise; to intercede in prayer for all sorts and conditions of men; and to declare the excellent character and works of our most excellent God.

We are God’s treasured possession, and as such we must be doing everything, that we can to honor his affection to us. We must be a priestly people, sharing the story of God’s love to those who do not know.