**September 13, 2020 Exodus 12:1-14**

 ***Should I Stay or Should I Go?***

**Scripture:** Exodus 12:1-14 NRSV

 *(1)The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: (2)This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. (3)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. (4)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. (5)Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. (6)You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. (7)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. (8)They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. (9)Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. (10)You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. (11)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. (12)For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. (13)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. (14)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.*

**Notes:**

1. The Hebrews are instructed by God to prepare; God gave them instructions, be ***ready*** to go.
	1. ***Moses*** would go to the royal palace
	2. God assigned Moses an assistant, his brother ***Aaron***,
	3. Moses explained to Pharaoh, ***God*** wanted the Hebrew’s let go.
2. ***God*** got fed up.
	1. Pharaoh’s resolve was ***weakening***.
	2. Even with all the ***plagues***, Pharaoh would not let the people go.
3. God instructed, prepare a ***lamb*** and mark their doorposts with its ***blood***, when God ***calls***, it’s time to go!”
	1. For generations they had weathered the storms of ***slavery***.
	2. They could see the ***pressure*** rising.
4. Following God, is not a life of static, predictability, and ***monotony***.
	1. This walk with God takes guts, determination, and ***persistence***.
	2. If you follow Jesus there will be many ***obstacles***.
	3. ***Jesus*** has done what is necessary to free you from the burdens of this world.
	4. Are you ready to pack up and go with ***God***?
5. Many ask if the ***sacrifices*** they make to follow Jesus are worth it.
	1. Do we want the ***treasures*** of the Kingdom of Heaven, or the treasures of this world?
	2. When we are called to action, ***will*** ***we*** ***go***?
6. The Hebrews are ***ready***.
	1. The Lord has heard our ***cries*** and seen our ***struggles***.
	2. We must be packed and ***prepared***, ***determined*** to do whatever it takes for the cause of Christ.
	3. The question you should ask, “Should I ***stay*** or should I ***go***?”

**Script:**

Jan and I have just returned from a brief vacation. During this trip we had some details to work out; What all did we want to do; Where did we want to go; And what sites did we want to see. But what if we were leaving and the chances of us returning were very slim? I say that thinking of those who have lost homes and possessions to disasters. Homes and belongings lost to wildfires, hurricanes, tornadoes, even war. I cannot imagine being told you need to get ready, because at any moment you will get the order to leave. What do you pack, and what do you leave behind; knowing that the things left behind may never be seen again.

First we would need to decide are we going to follow the order and evacuate. Many people choose to ride out the disaster, even at the cost of their own lives. But others heed the warning and go; what do you take with you? We all have things that are sentimental to us, but would we, when told you have 30 minutes to pack and evacuate, be concerned about those sentimental things; would we give them a value that is high in priority?

In our sermon passage today the prayers of the Hebrew people are being answered. The Lord heard their prayers and sent Moses to set the people free, to lead them on a return trip to the land promised to their ancestors; promised generations before by God himself. The only drawback is that Pharaoh does not want to let them go. So, God sends the plagues, but Pharaoh’s heart is hardened towards the Hebrews. After nine plagues Pharaoh would relent then return to his hard heart and deny them once again. And God has one more plague that would cripple the country, it would devastate them. The Hebrews are told be ready, prepare a final meal, and follow my instructions precisely. Join me in the reading of our Sermon Passage today, Exodus 12:1-14.

 (1)The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: (2)This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. (3)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. (4)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. (5)Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. (6)You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. (7)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. (8)They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. (9)Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. (10)You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. (11)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. (12)For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. (13)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. (14)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. Exodus 12:1-14 NRSV

The Hebrews are instructed by God to prepare. First they are to prepare an elaborate meal and then they are instructed to strap their traveling shoes onto their feet. Pack their bags and be ready, ready to run; where, they were not exactly sure; why, they did not know; all they knew, was God gave them instructions, and the instructions were be ready to go.

Rewind just a little bit to where we found ourselves last week, shoeless in the sand in front of a burning bush, with the voice of God echoing over the desert: “Moses, Moses!” Over the chapters that followed, God gave Moses a very detailed preview of what was ahead. God had heard the groans of agony coming from his people. God was ready to intervene to save them. And, Moses was the lucky one to get to break the news to the Pharaoh.

Last week Moses protested, but if you read on, you’ll see that his arguments got more and more passionate the longer he listened, to God explain exactly what he would have to do. Like, step one in the plan would be for Moses to go to the royal palace, to inform the Pharaoh that God wanted him to let all the Hebrew people free ; free from bondage to move out of the land of Egypt. Moses protested mightily, as you might expect (and as I would have done, I am quite sure). I have to say, out of all of his excuses I think my favorite has to be in chapter 4, verse 10, when Moses says: “O Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before now, nor since you have spoken to your servant; for I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.” Good try, but even that didn’t work. God assigned Moses an assistant, his brother Aaron, who would speak for him in those moments when he was feeling less than eloquent.

So Moses and Aaron trooped off to the royal palace; they explained to the Pharaoh that God wanted him to let the Hebrew people go. Predictably, Pharaoh was less than impressed. Moses and Aaron left and went back to report Pharaoh’s response to God, as if God didn’t already know. But the narrative is the narrative, and we need a big scene to stage the next dramatic turn of events. God said, “Well then, if Pharaoh won’t agree to my request, then I am going to stretch out my hand and make him sorry he declined.” Things were about to get bad for the Egyptian people . . . and they did.

The down-side for Moses and Aaron was that they had to keep going back to see the Pharaoh, delivering unlikely messages from God and hoping they’d get through each assignment alive. They turned sticks into snakes and water into blood. Hoards of frogs and insects infested the land; Egyptian cattle died by the thousands from unexplainable disease; the Egyptian people broke out in terrible boils; hail rained down and destroyed property and animals and people; the sun went out for three full days and the people walked around in darkness. And in between all of these horrible events, Moses and Aaron kept getting up, putting on their shoes and marching to the palace, delivering the same message over and over. God says: “Pharaoh, let my people go!”

Finally, moving toward our Hebrew lesson today, God got fed up. Pharaoh’s resolve was weakening, but there was no way he was going to let the Hebrew people go. A whole workforce, gone? It would devastate the Egyptian economy. No, he would not let the people go. Then the worst plague of all was announced, and once again Moses and Aaron were tasked with telling Pharaoh what would happen. God said, at midnight a great hush would fall over the whole land of Egypt, and the firstborn of everything in the land would die. The text says: “There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has not been, nor shall be any more” (11:6). And then, God said, finally . . . Pharaoh would let the people go.

This was the drama leading up to the passage we read today. Even with all the plagues, Pharaoh would not let the people go; the Hebrews could see what was going on but could never really imagine freedom. But all of the sudden, here it was. God instructed them to prepare a lamb and to mark their doorposts with its blood, a signal that they were ready, ready to get up and go to wherever God is leading them. Moses told them: “Get ready. Prepare your meal and eat it with your traveling clothes on; your sandals on your feet; your traveling stick in your hand. Eat quickly and be ready, because when God calls, it’s time to go!”

Can you imagine their fear and doubt? For generations they had weathered the storms of slavery in Egypt. They’d watched Moses and Aaron agitate the Pharaoh with their demands and they’d felt the effects of his intimidation as their workload increased as the conditions of their slavery got more and more harsh.

But they weren’t blind. They could see the pressure rising; they observed the plagues; they saw Moses and Aaron going back and forth to the palace to ask for their freedom. And so, when they got the list of strange instructions for dinner, they had to decide: were they going to pack up everything in their lives to follow the command of God? Were they willing to eat on the run, as God directed, even though they weren’t quite sure where they were running to?

Following God, as Moses and the Hebrews, is not a life of static, predictability, and monotony. There are dangers, toils, and snares around every turn. There is frustration, confusion, and doubt lying just ahead. There will be turmoil, rebellion, and conspiracy because that is the human nature. This walk with God is not for the weak and squeamish. It takes guts, determination, and persistence. Guts to step out on faith, not knowing where your steps will lead. Determination to keep following even when the discouragement is extreme. And the perseverance to see it through to the end.

Where are you today in your walk with the Lord? What struggles seem to have you bound to a never ending burden? Following Christ has its rewards, but know it is not all bluebirds and butterflies. You need to know that if you follow Jesus there will be many obstacles in your way; there will be days when you do not want to get up and keep moving; there will be times when the struggle does not seem worth it. Also know Jesus has done what is necessary to free you from the burdens of this world. He has looked at you in love, recognizing all of your flaws and weaknesses, seeing all of your sin and selfishness, and still, he spread his arms wide open and laid down his life for you. Are you ready to go the extra mile for him? Are you ready to pack up what is most important and go with him? Or would you rather stay here and suffer in the oppression of this world.

Many ask themselves if the sacrifices they need to make to follow Jesus are worth it. We need to make up our mind. Do we want the treasures of the Kingdom of Heaven, the kingdom of God? Or do we want the treasures of this world? There are many who follow the Lord who are very prosperous in this world. But following Christ is not a guarantee of wealth and prosperity. We need to know now when we are given the call, should we stay or should we go. When we are called to action, whether it is by our self or as part of a group, will we go? we need to be ready to go when God gives us the signal. We need to have our gear packed, the essentials of this world, and the rest will be sacrificed to the cause of Christ.

As we look to the Hebrews at their Passover meal, we must recognize that they are ready; they have endured the hardship of generations in slavery, they have cried out to God, and he has sent his servant to lead them. Likewise, the lord has heard our cries, he has seen our struggles. Now we must be ready to answer the call when it is given. We must be packed and prepared to leave on a moment’s notice. We must be determined to do whatever it takes to answer the call of God. And we must be persistent, constantly pushing forward in the cause for Christ. So the question you should ask yourself today is simple, “Should I stay or should I go?”