9/14/14 Pentecost 19a St. Luke’s, Shawnee

God had sent Moses on a mission, “Save my people....you will not be alone...” Today’s reading in Exodus gives us an example of how God was there, aiding his people, helping Moses to fulfill this mission. God acted in a way that may confuse us – the parting of the sea, giving Israel a way to avoid annihilation by the army of the Pharaoh.

As a result of this saving act, the army of Pharaoh was destroyed, Egyptian dead littering the shore.

The meaning of s*ea* here, in the Hebrew, is much like the meaning of water. Through water, God reveals something basic and essential. In Genesis, the waters were the beginning of Creation. With Noah the flood waters removed and purified the earth. In the Exodus, water was an act of salvation for God’s people Israel. This miraculous event of the salvation of Israel brought awe (fear, reverence) to the people, and they committed/devoted themselves to God and followed his servant Moses, a new way of life, led by the Spirit of God.

The basic emphasis of meaning of the water is what God brought about for the future.

Water becomes the sign of covenant - new beginnings. From a flood comes enrichment of the soil so crops can thrive. Water blends flour and yeast to form bread. Water cleanses so refreshment for new activity is stimulated. A child is conceived and brought to life in water. It is not what the water leaves behind that matters, it is what it brings forth. It is the sign of a covenant

Genesis/Creation – Covenant with all Creation

Noah – covenant with life

Exodus – covenant with a people.

In many ways, the spirit of water is like the spirit of forgiveness, it is not what it leaves behind that is important, it is what it brings forward.

In Romans, Paul tells us to welcome all, even if they do things differently from you.

Do not judge---who are you to pass judgment? Paul is pointing out that when we judge we are often looking back, making our past determine the rest of ours and the world’s future. For most of us, what we judge to be wrong is often devoted to us not to God. It is rooted in past hurts and fears things that threaten us deeply in some way.

In psychology, we talk of “projection” – a defense mechanism we use when reminded of something we do not like in ourselves. To avoid the sense of personal threat, we criticize others for the same problem. We joke about when women are “catty”...this is projection. Men do it, too, when they challenge each other to reassure themselves. Jesus talked about not pointing out the speck in someone else’s eye until you have dealt with the log in your own eye. Here Jesus is referring to our tendency to project our ills on others. When we do this, we are only using our own outlook and perception of what matters, commonly rooted in our own sense of imperfection.

This is often what gives us less-than-forgiving hearts. Think about the parable Jesus told in today’s Gospel. A king had a slave with a very large debt. The slave and his family were to be sold to pay the debt. This slave pleaded for more time, The king showed pity on him, and forgave him his substantial debt. The burden of the past was relieved and forgiven. That slave, however, when facing another who owed him a small debt, did not show any such concern or pity. He treated the other man harshly, and threw the man in prison until he paid his debt. The king learned of this lack of mercy –

in that the first slave did not model what he received. The king confronted the unforgiving slave and punished his lack of mercy and forgiveness.

Facing this outlook, so contrary to the ways of the world, Peter asks, “Well, how many times should I forgive another? Seven times?” Jesus replied, 70 x 7, meaning unlimited.

It is not a matter of numbers, keeping accounts, it is a matter of your outlook on life and yourself, as reflected in the face of God.

Paul asks: why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Why do you despise your brother or sister? We all stand before the judgment seat of God.

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves; if we live, we live unto the Lord and if we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. That is why Christ died and lives again.

Paul went on, summing it up: In whatever you do, honor the Lord. We recognized this in today’s collect: “Without you (God) we are unable to please you; grant your Holy Spirit may direct and rule our hearts in all that we do...” That is, do what is pleasing to God...

But, sometimes, no matter how faithful we try, we do not know what is pleasing to God.

What do we do in these situations?

One source of help is the knowledge found in His Holy Word, in the Scriptures. Familiarity with how God has been experienced by other faithful people and revealed in the past, can give us insights without having to “reinvent the wheel”, so to speak.

Also, prayer brings our need for God into clearer perspective at these times of uncertainty. Remember, this dialogue needs to be a two-way street, including a generous amount of patient listening on our part so we let God talk to us and inspire our actions.

Another source of help is the historical teachings of the saints, as they shared the experiences as ones who have faithfully struggled with life’s challenges and found God’s abundant grace revealed as their guide.

And, finally, allowing, with profound humility, that you may not know if what you are doing is right, but it is being done with the desire to honor and please God. In other words, we need a willingness to acknowledge and confess your errors. We do so with the assurance that God’s forgiveness precedes our confession. He knows our hearts before we do.

Our confession needs to be prompted by sorrow. The words of our confession need to be honest and thorough. Then the words of God’s forgiveness - the absolution – can wash us clean with the waters of God’s love, and make a difference. But that difference is not complete until we put it to work in ourselves and our life.

In that way, truly knowing God’s love allows us to more honestly be able to love others...

as Paul said, we welcome all, as sisters and brothers in Christ...

If my time here at St. Luke’s has meant anything to you, it is because I helped you to better understand how to take up the Cross of Christ and follow him, in every moment of every day of your life. And if you fall short in loving others, repent and return to the Lord

with a humble and thankful heart.

Let us pray:

(*Collect for the Feast of the Holy Cross*)

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross that he might draw the whole world to himself, mercifully grant that we, who glory in the mystery of our redemption, may have the grace to take up our cross and follow him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.