

## *Sermon*

### *When Two or Three are Gathered*

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Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

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Our Old Testament scripture from Exodus, we continue to follow Moses as he leads the Israelites out of Egypt. Now our scripture kind of skips over all the bad stuff God put upon the Egyptians. The plagues, the locusts, the frogs, yes frogs...hopping everywhere. And then the parting of the Red Sea so the Jews could escape Egypt. It is easy to get caught up in these stories, these accounts – and forget about the sacrament of Passover.

In the first part of the book of Exodus, the pharaoh refuses to let the Israelites leave Egypt and God responds with these series of miracles that attest to the formidable power of the god of the Israelites. God releases the frogs, gnats and flies – strikes disease upon livestock, infects people with infection, hail storms, locusts and darkness on the land...and at the last announces the death of the firstborn. As we read the book of Exodus, it reads like a thriller keeping us on the edge of our seat to see what will come next...and then Moses and Aaron are given instruction regarding a community ritual...in great detail God instructs the community to act together in order to allow God to perform this miracle to ensure the Israelites escape and freedom once and for all.

This instruction institutes what is still celebrated today – the Passover festival, which commemorates how the Lord spared the Israelites and did not destroy them when the land of Egypt suffered the tenth and final plague. The Hebrew word for Passover, *pesach*, means to “leave or spare by passing over”.

While still in Egypt, the Lord instructed Moses and Aaron to inform the Israelites

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Inspired by [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org) commentary on Matthew 18:15-20 by Richard Ward and commentary on Exodus 12-14 by Kimberly D. Russaw.

that each household was to sacrifice and hurriedly eat an unblemished lamb (or sheep or goat) – while English translation refers to lamb, the Hebrew word is a much broader term that includes many animals – the Passover makes room for those who could not afford a lamb to participate in the ritual with a less premium animal. It also allows for households that were too small to consume an entire animal and allows them to share with a neighbor. You see, the provisions of Passover make room for all in the community.

Tomorrow marks opening day of the Buffalo Bills 2023 – 24 season – always with great anticipation. I will likely see many of my colleagues tomorrow at ECMC dressed in their favorite Bills shirt or attire. Going to a Bills game can be quite exhilarating or even watching the game at a local eatery with others who are also fans of the team. Cheering as one very loud voice when we score a touchdown – in big games, I’m not gonna lie – I’ve been brought to tears feeling that communal energy all around me. I don’t jump up and down and scream like that for much else at this point in my life. Have you ever had occasion to watch a game alone for whatever reason? All that energy – that incredible vibration – is a bit absent. It’s still fun to watch, but that feeling of belonging, of being a part...is absent. We are addicted to being a fan because we are a part of something much bigger than ourselves.

There is something powerful about engaging in rituals with others. Our communion is one of those...where we are no longer individuals but are one people. Worldwide communion Sunday in October – we as a faith community come together worldwide to celebrate a meal just as Jesus asked us to.

The Passover story is clear that God thought of the entire community – all were to be included. Accommodations were included to ensure no one be left

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out because they could not afford the ritual, could not participate perhaps due to their living situation or station in life – God expected us to reach to our neighbors because within this love of God, there is not exclusion, only inclusion. Even when we fall short on human terms, in God’s eyes, we are still incredibly worthy – and loved.

Our New Testament scripture speaks to what it means to be a leader within the faith community and what is expected of us. The hierarchy in the church is one of representation – our Elders are nominated and expected to lead with clear minds and hearts. It’s easy to confuse this role and liken it to a Board of Directors where decisions are made based on logical information like balance sheets and written policy. Yes, it is expected that we look to information that is available to make decisions on how to allocate and appropriate but what is different is that in that process, we are to be humble and teachable – “as teachable as children” – Matthew 18, 1-5 states. Jesus followers must attend to matters of personal morality so that they don’t become stumbling blocks in the paths of others...and to care for one another in the manner Paul writes to the romans...”Owe no one anything,” he says, “except to love one another”. And be persistent in resolving situations involving conflict, be prepared to offer forgiveness to one another – no matter how many times it is asked.

There is no doubt that in this era of rapid social changes that affect church life, conflicts will arise. The question is: how will we deal with it? We do have a book of processes called The Book of Order, what a title – and it offers processes to deal with matters that require resolution. In a church though we have more than processes, we have principles and they go right to the heart of what it means to be the Body of Christ in our world.

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Our society has become very individualistic in many ways and collective gathering is not common. Many of us do not attend church on Sundays for various reasons – but when we are able to come together, even virtually, we gain that sense of what it means to be in the “stands” cheering on the home team of our faith life.

How we deal with conflict in this world has changed greatly too – for some reason, many people seem quite comfortable telling others their opinion – hurtful, insulting, direct and unsolicited – I was driving recently in Kenmore and I was looking for the street I needed to turn down...I got into the turning lane probably a bit slower than I should have and someone pulled up along side me and screamed so loud it startled me – with all my windows rolled up. Not much community in that guy – he might have asked if I was lost or looking for something – instead his instinct was to yell and alienate me.

Here is where we need to be different – Those of us who are bound together and follow the teachings of Christ serve a God whose will is that not even little ones should be lost. In service to our God and in the name of Christ, we become agents of reconciliation to each other and to the world that God loves.

So as we navigate a world who seeks to push people down, lets be the world that seeks to pull people together.

Amen