

Be Ready to Go

Exodus 12:1-14; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20 9-04-05

As I read the story of the preparations for Passover this past week, and reflected on the tragedy, which is taking place along the Gulf coast, I could not help but compare the two. In both instances the people who were under siege were told to make ready to flee their homes and all they knew that was familiar. And, in both cases, at the appointed time, they did. The disaster, which has occurred in our own country, should bring this morning's scripture reading from the Old Testament vividly alive for us. While things are beginning to get better, a mass of people is wandering, homeless and starving right here in our own country.

In the case of the Exodus, there was strong direction and strong leadership available for the nation Israel. In the cases of Louisiana and Mississippi and Alabama there, regrettably, was not.

The Israelites set out fearful but prepared. Most of those fleeing Katrina were simply fearful. Some were prepared and calm, and they were out of the pathway of that terrible storm long before it hit. But, it seems that many more were not: those 100,000 people in New Orleans who had no transportation enabling them to flee-- the poorest of the poor. Part of the problem came from a sense of well being when the storm seemed to turn toward the east, and because of the knowledge that some had ridden out other storms and survived in the past. This was just another. As we all know, one week later, it was not.

I know we hold all those suffering people in our prayers as we hold suffering people throughout the world in our prayers. Other nations have offered us their assistance, I hope we will be gracious enough to accept.

The Israelites knew as they began their journey, that God was leading them forward to The Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey, a land of their own and that they should have nothing to fear. But, I am sure there was fear of the great, unknown world that lay before them. In the forty years that were to follow, of wandering in the desert, there were many times they were on the brink of rebellion against Moses and God. While life in Egypt was far from ideal for them, it represented home. They were asked by God to become homeless wanderers; to give up all they had—to lose everything, even a sense of place that was their own.

The parallels in the Exodus are once again similar to those who lost everything in the hurricane. I am fairly certain all of us have a sense of home, a base from which to operate a place where, no matter how humble it may be, we feel safe. Many of those caught in Katrina's rage were

homeless, but still had a sense of place. Those places and spaces are simply gone. We, here in our safe places and spaces, cannot comprehend what it would mean to have no place of our own. The vision of American refugees going without even the basic necessities of life shocks and stirs us and puzzles us. We are considered the richest, most powerful nation on earth and it appears we have had trouble managing to cope with this disaster in a timely fashion. We see people suffering and dying, see body bags in the streets. We hear people crying out for some mercy, a drop of water, a piece of bread. Yet, for days there is no manna from heaven and no water springing from a rock.

Just as the nation Israel wondered at times, so many wonder here, just where God is and how God could allow this to happen. As God was and is and will be, God is present in all of this. Some think that God creates these natural disasters or allows them to happen to punish God's creation. They forget the rainbow set in the sky following the flood in Genesis that reminds us that God has promised that we will not be wiped out in a similar manner by our Creator's hand. In our world, in which we defy the basic laws of nature, one being, that water always seeks its lowest level, we cannot point any finger at God following a flood of such epic proportions. We humans often think we are far wiser than our Maker and capable of defeating Mother Nature. We need to learn a little humility and perhaps we have through this terrible event.

In all of this horror the very best and the very worst of human nature have appeared. We are taught that we must always overcome evil with good and we are trying to do so. Through us the goodness of God is revealed. Through the workers on the scene in the devastated areas, and to others who donate water and food or sit down and write a check to a relief agency. The love of God, which passes all human understanding shines above the wanderers in the murky waters as it shone over the desert wanderers so long ago. The love of God dwells within you and me and only waits to be extended to those who suffer lost and alone. Amen