

***Sermon October 11, 2020***

***Sermon Title: "THE LORD IS NEAR"***

***In this week's lectionary passages several stood out.***

***First: From Exodus***

***Moses implored the Lord his God and the Lord changed his mind.***

***Second: From Paul's Letter to the Philippians:***

***The Lord is near. The God of peace will be with you.***

***Finally from Matthew:***

***But they made light of it and went away. Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad. Many are called but few are chosen.***

***These passages tell us a great deal about God, about humanity, and about the relationship between the two. Exodus details the whole golden calf incident, revealing yet again the human propensity for impatience and idolatry. Our sin cannot be hidden, at least not for long. But within this all- to-common tale of human failing comes a story of courage. Moses stands up for the people---stands up for the people to God, no less. In this part of the reading Moses advocates so well for the people that irritate him so much that God changes his mind. We should note that last revelation. God's mind gets changed by a human being's pleading. In ways that ought to stun***

***us, God hears our cries and responds with mercy. The Lord is near indeed.***

***Paul tells the Philippians that the Lord is near in these final instructions and exhortations. Do not be afraid; do things that reflect the goodness of your near God. That God's peace will be with you when you do. Again, the intimate relationship between God and humanity gets featured. God cares about Euodia, Syntyche, and Clement. God is near these particular named people doing their best to spread the good news of Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnation of God's love. Can we not assume that God is near us, as well? Can't we be confident that God knows our names?***

***Certainly, we should not make light of this truth, this covenant relationship, this calling. That's the rub in the parable Jesus tells in Matthew. The kingdom of heaven, like a king giving wedding banquet for his son, should command our attention, render everything else secondary, gets us moving in the direction of the party immediately.***

***Each of the readings for this week remind us of the awesome nature of our inexplicitly close relationship to God. This is God's gracious doing. God makes a covenant with us, makes us God's own people, is near to us, knows us by name, offers us the peace that passes understanding, sends his son to redeem us and, yet, we make light of it and go astray or go away. No wonder God gets angry. God gives us nothing less than God's very self and we choose to worship a useless idol instead. God invites us to the greatest, most abundant, lavish feast imaginable and we shrug and choose to ignore the honor. Then we abuse and kill the very ones sent with the message that the king requests our presence. Our priorities are utterly scrambled and yet God persists on seeking us out anyway.***

***God changes God's mind in our favor over and over again. More servants are sent. God capitulates to Moses' pleas. Jesus becomes***

*incarnate, the Lord comes near, calls us by name and gives the peace that passes all understanding. Will we accept the invitation to be in such close relationship with God now?*

*If we do, the company we keep will be varied, both good and bad at the banquet, both good and bad within us, tax collectors and royalty, sinners each and every one. This covenant community is not pristine. We will not always be with polite company. The vast expanse of humanity will fill the halls of this king's banquet. We do not get to vet the guest list or choose whom we will sit beside at the Lord's table. Perhaps this is why we want to turn down the invitation and silence the ones who extend it. Maybe this is why the Golden Calf appeals so deeply to us. We want control and we want power. Being known for gentleness makes us vulnerable, laughable even. Saying yes to God's summons means saying no to lesser demanding invitations. So, many are called, few are chosen. Many are called, many refuse to attend and even those who come to the feast assume they can come as they are, take in all the sights and sounds, eat their fill and slip out the side door whenever they want.*

*But this intimate, covenant relationship with the most high God requires us not to just show up but invest ourselves fully. Jesus calls and came to same sinners, yes, but those called and redeemed respond with gratitude and transformed lives. They take up their cross and follow. They give away their second coat and repay what they stole from others and forgive as they have been forgiven. They worship God, not idols, and think on worthy things like truth, and justice, not perfectly, but diligently, prayerfully, repeatedly. This relationship with God, God's call and choosing of us, gets reflected in our relationships with others. Our outward living is commensurate with God's gracious calling. When we say yes to the invitation to the banquet, we dress the part, no matter how unexpected the summons to the party.*

***Moses implored. The Lord's mind was changed. The Lord is near. God invites us to the banquet again and again and again. Do not make light of that summons. Expect to mingle with all manner of people. Prayerfully strive for your appearance and actions to be commensurate with the call of the King of kings. Focus on whatever is pure and pleasing, just and true, honorable and excellent, whatever is worthy of praise. Then don't worry about anything because God is faithful, even when we are not.***