

Sunday, September 10, 2017

Exodus 12:1-14

Matthew 18:15-20

Moving Forward in Faith

So how has your week been? For some of you it was probably a little difficult to get up on a regular basis and be ready or get children and grandchildren ready for school. For others it was a beginning time where you experienced stress because others were anxious about new situations- be it work or school or even new activities and groups. But what did you do? You carried on and endured the butterflies in the stomach, the tension headaches, and even the lack of sleep at night and the need for naps in the afternoon. This is what occurs when there are changes in what we are expected to do and what we actually do. Yet not everyone has these same kinds of stresses during this week after Labour Day weekend but they remember the times when they did.

Maybe this week brought back memories of when you took your child to nursery school or JK/SK or when they started Grade 1 or 9 or even college and university where they moved away from home. This week might have even brought back tears for those moments now in our memories forever. But what we do with these moments, these stresses and even how we cope during these early days of this new academic year is in part why we gather together today here at Glenwood Church and say it is good to be 'home' again. For this place is not only where we meet our 'church friends', or where we worship together, but it is also the place where we expect God to move us to do something different, to experience him anew and to even call upon his Spirit to move us to a place where we never thought we might go.—into a relationship with Jesus his Son with a fuller understanding of who we are and might become if we just listen and follow.

In these next weeks, we will be hearing the story of the Hebrew people, Moses' people, the people destined for the Promised Land and some of the stories associated with that long desert journey which lasted so long—generations who lived and died in the desert but who had a profound hope for those who would follow. And through hearing their story again, it is hoped that God's Spirit will call you to change, to move in a different direction or even transition into what God calls you to be this at this time and in the months ahead.

Our reading from Exodus 12 is Moses' teaching to the people of faith that they are to celebrate Passover. This celebration marks a shift in the way they used to worship God, a shift

in focus of who they are as a people and the need to be ready to worship, and go and begin a new life. Moses has pleaded with Pharaoh again and again to let the Hebrew people be free from slavery. But Pharaoh needs these people to complete what they have done. Yet what is at stake is that Moses and the people believe in God and no longer need to be enslaved. God wants His people to live in the Promised Land. Moses prays to God and God promises that they will be freed. Several plagues occur—blood, gnats, flies, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, all with Moses asking for freedom to no avail. But when the plague of the firstborn is explained to Pharaoh and Moses people are prepared for what will occur does a mind shift takes place. It is when the firstborn son of the Pharaoh dies that he finally relinquishes his power and God's people are freed. But they must move and move quickly. And this day of Passover is recognized as a major feast for the Hebrew people when they are to eat with their cloaks tucked into their belt, sandals on their feet and staff in hand ready to go.

Moses instructs them about the significance of this moment of prayer; and how in one moment they are free to worship as they like, when they like and they are free. They are free to pack up and go where God is calling them. They are free to move forward in their faith. They are no longer slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt. They are no longer have to work as they once did but have the freedom to move to the place where God promised a good life. They no longer needed to dwell on the past and how they were slaves working long hours building palaces and grand homes for others; where life was difficult with no reward at the end. They no longer needed to have that hope that 'one day' they would be free. Freedom came and they were ready with sandals on their feet, staff in hand and a readiness to only look forward with anticipation. Their new life awaited them!

This past week marked the beginning of a new academic year—where the marks and achievements of the year ending last June are kept on student records; and the students of all ages now begin with new backpacks, pencils and pens and begin another chapter in their lives. They need not look back on those moments of stress from the previous year but to look forward to new challenges and new opportunities.

Just like Glenwood Church as we embark on this new year together. Today we acknowledge our 62nd anniversary and we know that there will be challenges ahead—our CE building will be getting a new roof and it will be paid by a loan. We will be challenged to pay back this loan over the next years, but by faith it will occur because what we share and do in these buildings known as Glenwood UC makes a difference in the faith journey of our church family members. Growing in faith means understanding, asking questions, sitting and talking not

just superficially about the storms of the world, but the important issues of transition when people are grieving the death of loved ones, when job losses are apparent, when pensions don't go as far as they used to, when God seems to have gone away and there is illness or heartache all around. Growing in faith together means moving beyond the sense of we are nice people here in the church—to how may we help each other as we live our lives as faithful disciples of Jesus. How might we express our need to share with others what we are looking for? For there is a wealth of knowledge, experience and faith in this place—how do we share it so that others can take new steps towards knowing Jesus personally so that they can trust him and not go back to their old self? How do we move forward in faith?

One way is to meet others here half way—ask each others' names, find out about each others' life—what you do/ did in your work life or even where you are studying/ grade etc. And to do this with someone you have never talked to and yet know their face as a Glenwood person. Another way is to ask God to help you in these days to meet others as each one of us transitions and changes because of our own individual experiences. As a church we hear the Good News shared through music, and word each week but putting it into practise takes practise and we do this practising here amongst our church family. For if we can talk and tell others about our life with those whom we know are Jesus' followers, we will confident to do so with those who are not. And in today's world, we need the confidence and boldness to stand up for our faith in Christ Jesus and like Moses' and his people, be ready to move when God calls.

Jesus said in Matthew 18, "that if two agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by God. For where 2 or 3 gather in my name, there am I with them." What is it that you are asking for as we move forward in faith? What is it that we hope to do together which goes beyond basic support of the church? What are you considering to be your call to serve in this church at this time? What do you hope to learn, to understand and even to ask?

The Hebrew people ate their Passover celebration meal cloak tucked, sandals on feet, staff in hand. How are you preparing yourself to move forward in faith? Where is your faith? What are you needing as you walk? How do you know what to pack and prepare? Are you ready to go?

Jesus said, "I am there—when 2 or 3 gather", you are not alone on this faith journey your church family walks with you and helps you along the way. Whenever you are hurting, reach out ask for help for prayer for support. Whether it is a broken arm or a broken heart; whether you are grieving a loss of a family member or a good friend. This church family cares and if you trust

others and they trust you—God is here and the spirit is moving us all forward to grow even stronger in faith. This church has been here for 62 years-when there were only a few houses in this marshland; before townhouses and big highways, before big ditches and large schools in the area. This was an area of growth and development. Glenwood Church is also an area of growth and development- spiritual growth and developing our faith as we come to be in relationship with God as we trust him to look after our needs. As we worship Him together as the creator of this universe that seems to be shaking and mixed up right now and as we call upon him to answer our prayers with yes, no maybe or not yet as He sees fit. And maybe as we look to Jesus His Son as the one who said gather in 2 or 3 and know I'm there.

Just imagine—a couple praying before bedtime—Jesus is there; a family offering thanks over dinner and sharing the day's events Jesus is there; a family gathered around a loved one who is sick or dying—Jesus is there; a Sunday School class with caring teachers asking questions, seeking answers and praying—Jesus is there; choir members joined together in singing- Jesus is there; board members- committee members group members—Jesus is there. So how do we move forward in faith—by letting God's Spirit lead us for Jesus will show us the way.

As we embark on this journey into our 63rd year, know that we are present for each other and we will call upon God for we are His people because of what we say and do in Christ's name. You are not alone, we are the church together and will live in God's world. Let us move forward in faith and see where God calls us to go and what to do now and in the future.

PRAYER