

LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS PROPER 16, YEAR A
Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost, August 23, 2020

The Rt. Rev. Susan B. Haynes

Exodus 1:8-2:10

Psalm 124

Romans 12:1-8

Matthew 16:13-20

Exodus 1:8-2:10

“Now a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph.” Often when transitions happen, communication suffers. In this instance, somehow, the beneficial notoriety that Joseph held, along with the Hebrew people, did not get passed on to the new Pharaoh. Consequently, this new king made the decision to harshen the arrangements under which the Hebrew people were living. They had to work harder with fewer resources. Life was becoming brutal. But the Hebrew people were hardy, and in spite of their worsening conditions, they managed to multiply and increase their population greatly. The king responded by instituting systematic genocide – he ordered the Egyptian midwives to exterminate any male Hebrew babies that they might deliver. Now, if we pay attention as we continue to read this story, we will see how God inserts Himself as the champion of the Hebrew people. He planted Himself within the consciences of the midwives who spared the Hebrew male babies and covered for them. He placed the love for her brother within Miriam’s heart who watched when Pharaoh’s daughter took Moses out of the water and then who ran to offer the services of Moses’ own mother as a nurse. He planted compassion in the heart of Pharaoh’s daughter. As a result, Moses was able to be raised by his own mother among his own people. The story continues by naming the cities in Egypt that were built with the Hebrew slave labor. Often, throughout history, we see that slave labor is used to build cities and societies. This says something about the resilience and perseverance of an oppressed people.

We cannot control the intentions and actions of people with evil designs. Yet, we can make room for the presence of and movement of God as He seeks to thwart the designs of the wicked and to turn their actions around. He certainly did this for Moses. Where in your own life or in the lives of those you love, do you see the movement and designs of God? Do you believe that things occur happenstance or by coincidence, or is God’s hand present?

Psalm 124

This psalm is a beautiful reminder that the chaotic waters of our lives would certainly overwhelm us if God were not present to rescue us. Water has a way of overtaking that which is in its path. Have you ever been knocked down by a wave or carried away by a current? Such things can overtake in an instant, leaving us no way to fight. Surrender and submission to the grace of God is life-saving.

Romans 12:1-8

After laying the theological groundwork in Chapters 1-11 of this epistle, Paul provides a three-step plan for being able to discern and live in the will of God.

1. First we are to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice and to consider it an act of spiritual worship. Worship of and following God requires that we do so whole-heartedly, holding nothing back.
2. Second, we are not to conform to this world. We are not to participate in the dualistic, polarizing energy of our current political and social climate. We are to be attentive to all relationships and to make room for each other within the household of God. When we do this, then all of our gifts are equally important.
3. Third, we are to allow ourselves to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Immersion in disciplines that will renew us intellectually and spiritually will lead to this transformation. And with such transformation comes the ability to discern and live in the will of God.

What would it take for you to value and care for your body in such a way that you could present it to God as a living sacrifice? How do you make room for others in your world, particularly those who are different from you or who hold different opinions? In what disciplines do you engage that allow for the renewing of your mind and spirit – Reading? Prayer? Exercise? Acts of Charity and Kindness?

Mathew 16:13-20

Caesarea Philippi was an ancient Roman city with shrines dedicated to the god, Pan. Many of its chapels and shrines are carved in the rocks of a cliff beside a spring. It is against this backdrop of Roman culture and religion that Jesus poses his question, “Who do you say that I am.” We know of Peter’s response, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God,” but perhaps we do not completely understand what a bold statement this was in this environment. Peter risks incurring the wrath of the Roman occupation. Jesus is obviously pleased with Peter’s response and indicates that such faith will become the rock on which the Church is built. But then Jesus baffles us by telling the disciples not to tell anyone of his identity as if this were a secret that must be kept at all cost.

Who do YOU say that Jesus is? As you stand against the backdrop of our own polarized and dualistic culture, how does Christ reveal Himself to you? Is it bold? Or is it a secret? However Christ is revealed, do you experience Him as a rock on which you can build your whole devotion to Him?