

LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS PROPER 19A

September 13, 2020

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Exodus 14:19-31

Psalm 114

Romans 14:1-12

Matthew 18:21-35

COLLECT:

O God, because without you we are not able to please you mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Exodus 14:19-31

The theme of **deliverance** is most prominent in today's text from the Hebrew Scriptures – God's deliverance of people whom He loves from all that pursues and attacks them. God acts through His servant Moses at the Red Sea to deliver the Israelites by way of parting the waters so that they pass through safely on dry sea beds while the waters close in on and flood the Egyptians who pursue the Israelites. God is described as moving actively to effect this deliverance – blowing a strong wind to drive the waters aside, moving the water through Moses' staff, causing Egyptian chariot wheels to grind fruitlessly in the sand and tossing Egyptian soldiers into the deadly waters like they were pick-up sticks out of a can.

You are beloved of God and His pillar of cloud and fire follows you to deliver you from all that pursues and seeks to oppress you. Who are those pursuers? What is it that presses down upon you and seeks to keep you in bondage – fear, doubt, anger? God is seeking to forge a path for you through these overwhelming elements and to destroy that which attempts to overtake you. Can you accept His deliverance?

Psalm 114

This Psalm speaks of the **triumph** of God. God is a god who can bring life out of lifeless places. He picks specific places in which to dwell (in this case, Judah and Israel), and those who oppose Him flee in terror. Living things skip and leap for joy in the presence of the Almighty. We are commanded to behold this God who brings life and casts out death. Our beholding should cause us to tremble with awe in His presence.

When was the last time you felt yourself in the presence of God? When was the last time you discerned that presence and felt yourself trembling inwardly with awe? Find a place and a few moments of quiet to sense how God might be trying to bring life to those lifeless places within you.

Romans 14:1-12

The theme here is **judgement**, not just the judgement of God, but also the way we judge our brothers and sisters. Paul reminds us that our accountability is to God, and while we are to care for one another and be accountable to our brothers and sisters in that respect, we are not to submit to their judgement or to expect that they would submit to ours. We are to decide in our own conscience and mind, with the help of the Holy Spirit, what is the path that we should walk. And because we trust that God upholds us, we can trust that He will be in the workings of our minds that are submitted to Him: ***“And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.”*** Paul reminds us that in both our living and our dying we belong to and are accountable to God.

Whom do you find it easy to judge? Do you yourself feel judged? Can you trust that God is moving, even in the workings of your own spirit, to direct you along the path that is uniquely appropriate for you? Can you release others from your judgment?

Matthew 18:21-35

God's **mercy** is thematic in this surprising parable. The parable itself is difficult to read because of its propensity toward violence. We are treated to a sweet episode of forgiveness and mercy early on when the Lord, in mercy, releases a lowly slave from a sizeable debt. The slave, however, then turns around and seizes a fellow slave who owes him money by the throat and threatens him. When others report him to the Lord, the Lord, who earlier had shown such mercy, turns violent, throws the slave in prison to be tortured and does not relent. God is serious, it seems, about this forgiveness stuff. He expects us to do it. While mercy is granted unconditionally to us who do not deserve, it does not come free of expectation. God expects and hopes that we might extend this mercy, so freely given, to others. If we do not, we might expect consequences.

Are you in touch with the mercy that God has extended to you because of His deep love for you? Is there someone who is indebted to you for any reason to whom you could extend that mercy?