

Love Is The Fulfilling Of The Law

**“Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”
Romans 13:8**

When you think of your religion, what was the defining moment for you? What was it that drew you to the Episcopal church and to St. Barnabas Church? When you think of your beliefs, what is the central ethical? What are your core values. When you think of your relationships, how do you form them, nurture them and maintain them? And when relationships break down, what can you do? What clues may we glean from this morning’s lessons?

I. The Defining moment for Israel-Exodus 12:1-14

The Hebrew community in Egypt was about to be freed from slavery. It had been centuries since the tribe of Jacob left Canaan and many decades of bondage in Egypt. One moment in history above all others became the defining moment for them. It was the First Passover which occurred on the fourteenth day of their first month, Nisan (March-April). Do you remember what our pass-over is called and when it occurs? Why, it is called Easter which according to Prayer Book page 880 falls on the Sunday after the full moon that occurs on or after the spring equinox, March 21st. In other words, from March 22nd through April 25th.

After nine plagues were visited upon Egypt, the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn of all animals and humans, convinced Pharaoh to let the Children of Israel go free. This is how the first Passover was established.

- 1. On the tenth day of Nisan, each family or families in close proximity selected an unblemished yearling lamb or goat from their stall and kept it separated for the next four days.**
- 2. Then on the fourteenth day of Nisan in front of the whole assembly at twilight, the yearlings were slaughtered.**
- 3. Upon returning to their individual or appointed houses, they spread the blood of the sacrifice upon the doorposts and lintels. Shed Blood denoted the wiping away of sins.**
- 4. That night, they roast the whole yearling with every part in tact and ate it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Roasting it whole was a way of showing respect for the sacrificed unbroken animal and to ward off evil. The unleavened Bread was an emblem of purity. The bitter herbs reminded them of their hardships in Egypt.**
- 5. 4-successive cups of wine mixed with water were consumed. (Years later a cup of wine and a chair were added for the return of Elijah).**
- 6. None of the sacrifice was to remain until the morning. Left overs were burned.**
- 7. They ate it hurriedly with girded loins, sandals on their feet and a staff in their hands as a symbol of their rapid departure from Egypt.**
- 8. For them, there were two pass overs:
 - a). God passed over the whole land of Egypt that night and struck down their firstborns, thus executing judgement on the gods of Egypt and upon Pharaoh.****

b). A second pass over was over the Hebrew houses that were marked with the blood of the lamb. That first Passover commemorated God's saving their firstborns and their freedom from slavery. Finally that day of remembrance was established to be observed as a perpetual ordinance. Later, it was linked with the feast of the Unleavened Bread.

Our pass over, Easter, celebrates our salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Forty days of Lent prepares confirmands, lapsed members and all Christians for baptism/first communion and restoration into the church. We, then, celebrate Easter with beautiful floral decorations and a festive Eucharist. Each Sunday thereafter is a little Easter; a mini Christian pass over.

Over the year, like with our Eucharist, the Passover or Seder became the touchstone of the Jewish faith. On the night before he died for us, Jesus told his disciples to observe the Lord's Supper in remembrance of him until he returns.

You may be thinking, "What a painful and bloody beginning!" Nevertheless, the realities with which we live are never pretty. Our nation's beginnings were, after all, not just a Boston Tea Party. It was soldiers dying on the battlefield, widows and orphans left desolate and a people who had to eke out a living on the barren plains of their westward movement. Then too, our young men and women have to risk their lives to keep us safe and secure as a nation. Every good accomplishment is gained only through the blood, sweat and the tears of many. That is the way it was, is and will always be until Christ returns.

The First Passover was the defining moment for Israel. Each of us has had defining moments in our lives. How can we remain true to the vision of those moments? What is our guiding principle?

II. Central Belief and Core Values-Romans 13:8-14

In the ancient world, people owed taxes for every thing. There was a ground tax, income tax and a poll tax. There were taxes on customs, duties, imports and exports, roads, bridges, animals, carts, and there were market and harbor taxes. Paul admonished his hearers to owe no one anything, except to love one another. You may be asking, how then does this love look and behave? If we abide by the principle of love, are we exempt from the Law that Moses taught? Of course not! Paul tells us why in exploring four of our six duties toward our neighbor. We are not to be adulterers because such stolen passion means that we love our spouses and the church less. We are not to murder because love never seeks to destroy. We are not to steal because love is more concerned with giving. And we are not to desire forbidden things because love cleanses the heart until desire goes away. "*Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.*"

An individual Christian or a church community must have a central belief system and core values. For the Hebrews, it was the Torah for which love of God and love of neighbor were central. Paul stated that Love is central and is the fulfilling of the whole Law. Having the love of God in our hearts, we must know what time it is-a time to be alert and stay awake. Loving ourselves and our neighbors, we are to lay aside darkness, reveling, drunkenness, debauchery, licentiousness, quarreling, and jealousy. We are to equip ourselves as soldiers of Christ against the world and the devil, putting on the armor of light

and putting on Jesus Christ. And above all, we are to live honorably, not gratifying the desires of the flesh.

Here at the very center of the Christian ethic is love as the lynch pin. Clean living and an orderly society must constitute the behavior pattern of the Christian community. And there is a whole new approach to living in the light of the Lord with our bodies as temples in which God is glorified. But, we do not always live that way.

III. When Things Go Wrong As They Sometimes will-Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus spoke of the importance of conflict resolution in the Christian church and it does work! One Christian offends another either wittingly or unwittingly. There is a tear in the fabric of the church. How can the breach be healed? Silence in the face of such brokenness eats like a cancer at the esprit decor. The offended is often dealt, what seems like, a mortal blow. The health and sanity of the offender gets skewed to entitlement or shameful silence. Trust in the leadership is often lost. Confidence in a just and orderly community breaks down. And, none feel safe or protected in the church. Jesus gave us a four point formula which works whether we all agree or not.

1. The offended person is to go and point out the offence to the offender. Sometimes, the offender does not know that he/she has hurt another. At other times, the offended is afraid to confront the offender. If the offender acknowledges the wrong and is willing to make restitution, the tear is mended. The church heals and moves on.
2. If the offender is not willing to listen, then the offended is to take with her/him one or two others to attest to the attempted reconciliation. Then the two or three witnesses can hear the conversation and attest to the proceedings.
3. If the offender does not offer contrition and restitution, the matter is to be brought before the council of the Church. If the matter is settled satisfactorily, then the body is the better for it.
4. However, if these attempts do not bring restitution and reconciliation, then the offender is to be to that church as a Gentile and a tax collector. What Jesus meant, I think, is that they are to be treated as outsiders and not as a members of the body; although the doors of reconciliation are always left open.

The Gospel for this morning ends on a more positive note than the breaches that often occur within church. Jesus admonishes the church to come to an agreement. *“For, where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”* Matthew 18:20. Jesus will be in the midst of the agreeing church and they will function as the living and renewing body of Christ.

The Jewish Passover was the defining moment for Jews. Paul like Jesus identified love as the central attitude and ethic of the Christian community. And, Jesus taught that reconciliation and healing begin with relational restitution. I pray and hope that every member of St. Barnabas church will remember and use this method in your relationships with one another from henceforth and for evermore.

Let us pray. O God, who delivered your children from bondage in Egypt and gave them a new way of life; who loved us so much in your Son Jesus Christ that he died for our sins; and who arbitrates peace and justice in Christ's living body, the church: Give us love, peace, joy and prosperity in our time. We pray this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Rev. Emery Washington, Sr., September 7, 2008