

March 4, 2021

Lectionary Passages:

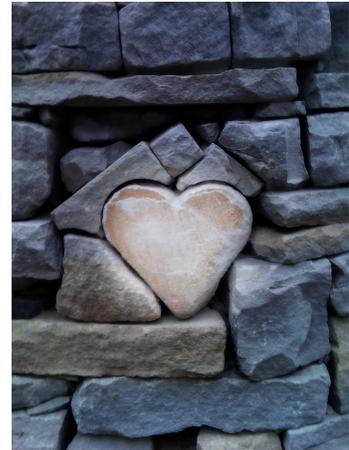
Psalm 19

Exodus 19:1-9a

1 Peter 2:4-10

Selected Verses:

The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge. – Psalm 19: 1-2



You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. – Exodus 19: 4-6

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. – 1 Peter 2: 4-5, 9

Devotional:

It had been three months since Israel had left Egypt. Moses had led the Israelites to Mount Sinai, the place where God had promised to bring Moses and the Israelites. Over the past three months, they had seen the hand of God deliver them as on "eagles' wings." In the book and movie, "Lord of the Rings," Gandalf the wise is saved from the prison of evil on eagles' wings. The scene in the movie is amazing. One moment, Gandalf is trapped in a tower realizing the evil and destruction that is coming over Middle Earth. Everything is dark and grey. The next moment, he is soaring on the wings of eagles in bright sunlight, enjoying the freedom from captivity and the responsibility of bringing a saving hope to the righteous.

It is this image of freedom to soar on the wings of eagles that God used to describe the saving journey from the slavery of Egypt to Mount Sinai. God has faithfully led His people out of slavery and bondage and brought them to His holy mountain. The saved people are God's treasured possession, the apple of His eye. He will continue to guide, protect and care for them as a treasured possession on the condition they obey His voice and keep His commandments. Exodus 19 is the prelude to the giving of the 10 commandments in Exodus 20.

We all know how that turns out. While Moses is on the mountain receiving the commandments, the people are having Aaron, the high priest, build them a golden calf idol. Even

though God has bore them up on eagles' wings, they have quickly sinned and fallen short of their calling. God wants them to be a royal priesthood, a holy nation, yet they fail every time. The purpose of being a holy nation is to draw other people to God. The purpose of being a priest is to come into the presence of God and share God's blessing and saving grace with the world. Israel's calling was to be a holy nation, a royal priesthood in a world full of people trapped in the prisons of sin and darkness.

During the forty years in the wilderness, the place where God is most fully present is in the tabernacle signified by the Ark of the Covenant. When Israel became a nation, King Solomon built the Temple and placed the Ark in the Holy of Holies. This is where God is most fully present, until he came in Jesus Christ. Now, the temple is in a person, thus a living stone. A stone that the builders rejected when they crucified Jesus. When Jesus was crucified, the curtain in the Temple tore from top to bottom. The image is that God is no longer confined to the Holy of Holies, God's presence has come down from heaven and is on earth. On the day of Pentecost, God's Holy Spirit started dwelling within His holy people.

Since God's Spirit dwells within us, we are God's holy Temple. We are living stones. Together, followers of Jesus Christ are being built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to be a royal nation. As the living temple of God, the place where God dwells, we are being shaped day by day into God's own people in order that we may proclaim His mighty acts to the world. To proclaim that God has taken us out of the prison of sin and darkness and raise us up on eagles' wings into the brilliant light of day. We are no longer trapped in darkness, we have received the freedom to live in God's light and walk in His ways. To be a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.

#### Prayer:

Almighty God, in your Son, Jesus Christ, you have broken the bondage of sin and death. You have carried us on the wings of eagles and brought us into the light of your salvation. We thank you for bringing us into your light to be your people. Help us to share your light and your love with others who are lost, lonely and hurting. Help us to remember your grace and live as your people, a holy nation a royal priesthood, your children. Lord, continue to shape us into the people you would have us be. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.