

The First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham

“New Beginnings: Exodus”

Rev. Dr. John Judson

February 7, 2016

Exodus 34:29-35, Luke 9:28- 43

I don't know if you have noticed or not but there are seemingly about 200 people running for president. And they appear willing to do anything to win. They will lie about their opponents. They will stretch the truth in order to make themselves look good. They will cherry pick statistics in order to prove their points. They will ignore facts of any and every kind. They will simply make things up. (Oh and by the way I am not speaking about your candidate, only all of the others). And in the end they will blow like a reed in the wind in order to bend in the direction they think will get them into the White House. My question is though, why do they want it? Why do they want to be president? Oh, sure it looks like a great job. You get to ride around in motorcades, fly on Air Force One, give press conferences and supposedly be the most powerful man on the face of the earth. But in reality it is a somewhat thankless job. People criticize you, demean you, question your every decision, and the popularity fades. And in the end you age. Have you ever taken a look at a picture of a president when he comes into office and then when he leaves? The office ages you. Why would anyone want it?

We could ask the same thing of being the messiah. Who would want the job? Oh sure it looks like a great job. You have millions of twitter followers and a billion Facebook friends. You have crowds follow you everywhere and disciples who, at least for a moment, say that they will give their lives for you. And you get to hold summit conferences with the greats of the faith; with Moses the lawgiver; with Elijah the greatest of the prophets. And you get to have God affirm your calling. But in the end you know where it is going to lead...or at least Jesus knew where it was going to lead. It was going to lead him to being deserted. It was going to lead him to arrest. It was going to lead him to trial, and then to being flogged and then to the cross. It would lead him to being totally alone as if God had even left the building. My God, my God why have you forsaken me? Then it would lead to a slow, painful, humiliating death. Who would want this kind of a job? Why would Jesus do this? The answer to this question, interestingly enough can be found not at the top of the mountain, but at the bottom.

One of the interesting things about the first three Gospels, Matthew, Luke and John is that they share a core set of stories, yet the stories are seldom told in the same way and in the same order. Each writer carefully crafts stories to make his own particular point and places them in different locations in the overall take they are telling. That is except these two stories. The tale from the mountain top is always followed by the story of the boy who is demon possessed; a boy in fact who is in such a difficult way that not even the disciples can save him. He was lost. He was forever a prisoner of pain and suffering. And into this situation comes Jesus who, even in exasperation, sets the boy free. Jesus drives out the demon, which is why Jesus wanted the job. He wanted the job of messiah because he knew he was the only one who would be able, not only to set this boy free, but to set humanity free; to lead humanity on a new exodus from fear, captivity, pain and death into a new reality. I use the word exodus because Luke uses it. He uses it in verse 31, where in English we read the word “departure”, the Greek says exodus. Jesus at new life. This is why he wanted the job.

I realize that both of these stories, Jesus on the mountain and the healing of a demon possessed child, seem a bit Lucas film-like, meaning something we would see on the big screen but not in real life. Yet the reality of our lives is that there are those things that possess us; control us. We are possessed by guilt; by a guilt from which we do not believe we can be forgiven. We are possessed by our own anger; by our inability to forgive and thus give ourselves freedom. We are possessed by our fear of not being successful enough, saving enough or living up to the expectations of others. We are possessed by other fears. We become fearful of the future for ourselves, for our children, for our grandchildren. We worry about them, and about ourselves. We worry about the world and become fearful of what the news brings us. And as long as we are possessed by these things they will rob us of the joy and peace that God wants us to have; the joy and peace for which we were designed.

Therefore we are in need of an exodus moment. We are in need of freedom. And it is for that reason that Jesus Christ came into the world, to not only set that boy free, but to set us free; to allow us to experience the fullness of hope, joy, love and peace that can be ours. The challenge then that I lay before you this morning is this, to ask yourselves, how am I allowing Jesus to set me free? To lead me on a new exodus? To allow his joy and peace to become mine? And as you ask, remember, freedom and joy can be yours as surely as it was for that boy.