

Freedom. The Israelites are finally free of their Egyptian overlords. This is the last week of my Exodus series and it ends with freedom for the Israelites who had no weapons to use against their foes except God-with-them. God desired them to be free and that gave them the courage to strike out for the wilderness with a meal of roasted lamb to fortify them. And they broke free.

It can't be understated how important this event is in understanding the Jewish faith... throughout all time. They have always been a people who placed their faith and hope on the living God to see them through the most dire of situations.

We are also heirs of this faith and hope. Jesus Christ himself was a Jew who knew the foundations of faith as well as any Chief Priest or scribe of his time. Jesus would have recited with the congregations the Song of Moses; **"Pharaoh's chariots and his army [God] cast into the sea."** Many of the psalms, like the one that we hear this morning, recall the Exodus and God's mighty act of salvation. **"They had forgot their Savior who had done great things in Egypt."** Ps. 106:22

And, sadly, many of us, ourselves people of faith in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ also forget our Savior. The story is repeated over and over by the prophets to bring the people back to the most important thing God did and God continues to do – save us and free us from sin and death.

Jesus, in his parable we heard this morning about the great banquet to which the invitees shrug and say, "You know, I just remembered, I have some business to attend to. I can't come." This story has been used by priests and bishops alike throughout the centuries to reinforce the idea that all Christians must attend church every Sunday. If you don't then you risk being thrown into the outer darkness. The commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day reinforces this. Oh, and by the way, you had better dress properly too when you come to church. (Some of us remember how we were told to dress for church when we were children.)

I do want to say a little more about this; the wearing of a particular wedding garment is a metaphor. Jesus does not mean literally that one who is chosen from off the highways and byways will be cast out for his or her clothing. Jesus is referring to some, unknown people, who are part of Matthew's Christian community, but are not putting on faith. Perhaps there are people who attend the meetings or services in that fledgling congregation who do not really believe in Christ or perhaps are disruptive. They are to be cast out because of a lack of respect, forbearance or generosity and openness of spirit.

We do not hold church attendance over people's heads nowadays. Sure, that has meant that congregations are smaller, but it is never a wise thing to try to force people like me to anything, let alone guilt me into something. We are a faith, a church, that seeks to *attract* people not *coerce* people to come to Jesus. We believe that if a person learns in his or her heart that God saves us through times like the Exodus, and God frees us through the cross and the Resurrection, then their hearts will guide them to the community of the faithful and the grateful.

And so, that brings me to the sad event in our parish life this last week. Our friend, our companion on the way, our Junior Warden, Allen Berrien died last Wednesday. His faith brought him to Trinity a number of years ago. He first showed up on his bicycle and had been coming ever since. I have received numerous phone calls, texts and emails from you since the parish announcement went out on Thursday. We all loved Allen,

ever chipper, ever helpful. And we know that he has struggled for the last few years with lungs that didn't function very well.

He gained freedom from difficulties he had faced at earlier points in his life. He found support and love in the two very important communities of his life. And now he has had his own exodus from his difficult breathing problems and now he is truly free, free at last. He has experienced resurrection to Eternal Life. He will be sorely missed at Trinity.

We who were on the Zoom coffee hour last Sunday were so pleased to see Allen then, our last time. He looked OK. He was trying to be his usual upbeat self. And he told us about how he had been gaining weight and that he loved being at Noble Horizons for the care and the busyness of the place – lots of friendly faces coming and going all the time.

He was very grateful to be in a nursing home. How many of the rest of us would think to be grateful if we are in a nursing home? Mostly, we, I should say I, don't care for the thought of not being in my own home, and having to conform to the schedule of other people in an institution. But Allen was just grateful for the care and good food he was receiving.

This sad death reminds us once again of the fragility of our lives. We don't know when we'll be called home. But we do know that Jesus extends an invitation to the feast all the time. Whether it's a Sunday Spiritual Holy Supper or a feast day celebration, All Saints Day is right around the corner, or even something as simple as the invitation to take time to pray at the beginning, middle or end of the day. Let's not turn down opportunities to connect with each other, and with our Lord.

Let us not forget God's might act to free us at the Exodus, save us at the Resurrection and be with us always through the Word of God and the Sacraments drawing us ever closer to Jesus.