

Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost, Sunday, October 5, 2014 Year A

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 15:9-16

***“An Exodus ”***

What I want to know is – how in the world did Moses move 600,000 people from Egypt to the wilderness and then to the Promised Land? We only had 1,000 plus miles to travel – and I could spend a few days telling you of the obstacles that we ran into - but thanks be to God – we made it – and Douglas is our new home.

On behalf of Marilyn, John, Theresa and Essey – thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your prayers, your kindness, and for your support! When we got to our new home we were greeted with a stocked refrigerator and pantry. Y'all have blessed us beyond description. Thank you!

Last week at St. Bartholomew's - the rector, Fr. Ward told the congregation that my family and I have come “full circle.” My call to ordained ministry began on a trip to Israel, which was led by our Bishop, Bishop Neil Lebhar and his wife Marcia, on which I was healed in the Jordan River as Marilyn and I recalled our baptism – and when I came up out of the water – everyone and everything was bathed in a bright white light. My right leg began to burn, went numb and the pain has been gone ever since. Two days later, while sitting with two friends near the lower waterfall at Ein Geddi , I heard my name called “John” – and I said “*what?*” and The Rev. Lynne Ashmead, who was next to me, said “*no one said anything.*” I closed my eyes and I heard that voice again – calling my name, and then giving me a picture showing me vested at an altar, blessing the bread and wine, and then telling me “*You must do this in grateful obedience.*” The call came with a trip to Israel.

Nine years later, Marilyn and I led a trip of nineteen people to Israel – and shortly after we came to Douglas, met with y'all, and then received your call to serve as Rector. Our call began with a Shoresh trip to Israel and has now been brought full circle with a Shoresh trip to Israel. Shoresh is the Hebrew word for “root” and is I believe the best way for Christians to learn about our connection to our Jewish roots.

In today's first reading from the Old Testament book of Joshua – the Lord commands us to be “*Strong and courageous*” “*for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go,*” and more importantly to be obedient to His call on our lives – **all of our lives.**

When the Lord God led people of Israel out of Egypt – He demanded obedience of His people and because of Moses' disobedience – Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land, he could view it from at Mount Nebo, but not allowed to set foot in it. Because he struck the rock twice when commanded to hit is only once at to draw water at Meribah. God is a Holy God and He simply asks us to obey Him. We can see the imperfection of man in contrast to the perfection of God

When the risen Jesus met His disciples on a mountain in the Galilee, as can be read in what we commonly call the Great Commission, Matthew 28:16-19 – He commanded the Apostles - and us - to teach others “*to obey everything I have commanded.*” When God repeats Himself it is with good reason – He wants us to pay attention. He commands us to obey – and Jesus commands us to “love” as well.

A teacher of the Law tried to trip Jesus up when he asked which is the greatest commandment of the Law? Jesus responded with a perfectly brilliant answer: *"YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND."* *"This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'* He went on to say *"On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."* (Matthew 22:37-40) Jesus was reminding this teacher of the law and the Sadducees present of something that they knew very well – something that is inscribed on their own doorposts, called the "Shema." Every good Jew knows this prayer from Deuteronomy 6:4-9 *"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* Jesus added the second – that we *"love our neighbor as ourself."* We are reminded in both "great commandments" that love is and must be an important part of our lives.

Jesus said *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love."* Jesus simply asked each one of us to love and obey – and that thread runs throughout His Gospel. He never said it would be easy – but He says we must do both. There are people that we run into that we don't necessarily like – but we are called to love them and show them the greatest kindness that can be given – we can pray for them – especially for those who do not know Jesus. We should pray that the Holy Spirit would reach out to them and transform them with the love of Jesus Christ. In today's Holy Gospel – Jesus shares with us of the greatest sacrifice that He would go on to make for us. *"Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because servants do not know their master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."* Once again God calls on us to do two things – love and obey. He repeatedly asks us to love and to do *"everything I command."* Jesus said Himself *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."* (Matthew 5:17) Just because Jesus gave us 2 commandments He was not watering down or telling us to ignore the 10 that were given to Moses in the wilderness. Instead, Jesus was clarifying the 10 that had been given, with the first four being vertical – (how we are to relate to God) and the next 6 being horizontal - how we are to relate to one another. If we can follow these - then we are truly fulfilling the TWO great commandments – just as Jesus asked. We should be truly thankful for all that God has given to us – living in "grateful obedience."

As I reflect today on my installation as the new rector of St. Andrew's - thinking of Fr. Ward's words last week and that summer day in June of 1999 at Ein Geddi, Jesus' words from today's Gospel call out to each one of us. To be truly called by Jesus does not necessarily mean ordained ministry, but instead means that each of us has a task for His Kingdom. *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that*

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*will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.* ( John 15:9-16) Jesus “calls” and equips each of us to spread the Good News – in the words of the original New Testament Greek “εὐαγγελίου” “*euaggelion.*” He tells us that whatever we ask in His name will be given – especially in ministry – and so we pray “In Jesus Name” at the end of our prayers – simply trusting in His provision for the ministry that He has called us to. Isn’t it awesome to think that the creator of the universe has our backs! He wants everyone to know the WAY to heaven – and the invitation is open to everyone. The way is Jesus, and everyone who believes in Him will see the Father. God offers a new life and forgiveness through Jesus. Jesus calls on us here at St. Andrew’s to carry His Gospel to others - obediently sharing what He has given to us – a message of New Life. Jesus said in Matthew 5:16 “*let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*” People can see who you believe in by your witness through word and deed. How we act reflects our obedience to the two great commandments. It is our call to share the love of Christ with the people of Douglas; to the people of Coffee County.

How we love others is what The Apostle Paul is talking about in his letter to the Romans –that we heard earlier in this service. He wrote “*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.*” My brothers and sisters -St. Andrew’s is a team, a family that is beginning a new chapter today. “He said “*Be of the same mind toward one another;” “so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.*” We live in a community that absolutely needs to know that St. Andrew’s Anglican Church exists; that St. Andrew’s Anglican Church is healthy, and that St. Andrew’s Anglican Church is welcoming to everyone who comes through our doors. We are called to be loving and to be praying for the transforming love of Jesus Christ to touch them and to change their lives.

- Today is the celebration of a new ministry;
- Today is the celebration of all that the people of St. Andrew’s have done - dedicated to keep this church together in worship, fellowship and love;
- Today is the celebration of our dear Bishop coming to meet the people of his care.
- Today we also give thanks for Fr. James who gave his time each Sunday, leading you in worship.
- Today is a new beginning – an exodus of sorts – leaving behind any painful memories of betrayal and hurt – looking to move forward on a new course.
- Today we seek God’s blessing on this parish family – and He may find us faithful, obedient and loving Him and one another – and that we would “*bear fruit – fruits that will last.*”