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*Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> September – The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity*

*Readings: Exodus 12:1-14 & Matthew 18:15-20*

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## **Exodus 12:1-14**

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, ‘This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbour, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the door-frames of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire – with the head, legs and internal organs. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord’s Passover.

‘On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

‘This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord – a lasting ordinance.

## **Matthew 18:15-20**

‘If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that “every matter may be established by the testimony

of two or three witnesses.” If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

‘Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

‘Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.’

## Reflection

September always feels like a fresh start to me. Full of new beginnings and exciting possibilities. It feels apt that our passage in Exodus begins with God explaining a fresh start to His people. ‘This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year’. Perhaps this week you could ask God if there are any fresh patterns or routines in your relationship with Him? We see Him tell the Israelites how to work together as a community, to make sure that everyone is included and provided for, and how to prepare for Him to act.

I love that as a parent does, the Lord explains to his people what is going to happen, and what they must do. And finally, the promise; ‘When I see the blood I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt’.

Many times in the bible we see God explaining how his people must live and reminding them of his promise to be with them and to keep them. Before the promise comes though, the Israelites must prepare. God gives them very specific instructions which set them apart from the people they live among. And before seeing the promise, these preparations may well have seemed crazy.

Is God asking you to make some preparations so that we can see Him move?

Our passage in Mathew follows a similar pattern, some instructions, and then a promise. And it’s quite awkward. (Well for me anyway. I don’t like conflict. I don’t like being in conflict and I don’t like observing conflict.) However, because we all sin and mess up, conflict is an inevitable part of life and relationship, so some instruction about how to handle it is very helpful!

First of all, Jesus says to deal with sin privately. Just between two people. No tale telling, no gossiping. Just straightforward. However if that doesn’t work,’ take one or two along so that matters may be established by the testimony of two others’. This is not to embarrass or shame somebody, but to keep relationships transparent, and to have some accountability. It makes me think of mediation. Then if this still

doesn't work, Jesus says to 'treat them as a pagan or tax collector'. This shows us how important reconciliation is. Jesus is calling us to unity within the Church.

We see so much disunity and conflict in our society, and this is one of the ways that we are called to be different. Being part of the Church means that we have a responsibility towards each other. Our passage in Exodus showed how everyone was to be included and provided for. It's very easy in our society to prioritise individual rights over collective responsibility. I wonder how much this sin, this selfishness has led to the state that our environment is in.

Within the church though, we must look after one another. And when someone is not following Jesus's commands, we need to lovingly point them back to Jesus.

The wonderful thing about this passage is the promise. Jesus offers us a guide to handle our sin and its consequence, but more important is the promise of His presence. Jesus tells us that 'where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them'. I think even in the conflict, Jesus is with us. He is with us so that he can help us to work through it.

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