

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Exodus 2:23-25; 3:1-15; 4:1-17
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 October 1, 2017

We are so fortunate that we live in a free country where we can **speak our minds, protest, disagree with our leaders and vote to elect new leaders.** Thousands and thousands of our citizens have fought and died in order to **preserve the right we have to peacefully protest** against things that we believe are wrong in our country. In the September 25, 2017 edition of **USA TODAY**, Nancy Armour, USA TODAY sports writer addressed the protests by players and owners at many NFL games last week. There have been many comments on both sides of whether it is appropriate to **not stand, take our hats off** and **salute** as our national anthem is played. Nancy Armour said, **“Whether black, white or brown, on bended knee or with locked arms, the NFL’s rare show of unity was both a dignified condemnation of the wrongs we still must right and a reminder that, for all of our differences, America remains our common ground.”** An elderly man who sat behind me at Aitkin’s football game Friday refused to take his hat off for the national anthem. I don’t know why. . .

Later in the article, Nancy Armour said, **“The demonstrations by ... the players who joined in are not about the national anthem or the military or the flag. They never have been. They are about the racism that continues to be pervasive in our society, manifesting itself in police brutality, economic inequality and disparity in education and opportunity.”** The statement issued by the **Seattle Seahawks** said, **“Out of love for our country and in honor of the sacrifice made on our behalf, we unite to oppose those that would deny our most basic freedoms.”** I can’t believe that Minnesota has the **nation’s largest gap** between whites and Native Americans when comparing education levels.

At **Men’s Breakfast**, Friday, we talked about the **Vietnam War** movie series that has been playing on public television. **Ken Burns** and his team put together amazing film footage and tapes and secret correspondences to cover years of lies and top level angling for political gain by both Democratic and Republican presidents, secretaries, congressmen, etc. It showed lots of the protests going on here, in Canada and overseas. I thought our fellows, three of them Vietnam

veterans, might be angry about the frank coverage. They only seemed to be angry about **Jane Fonda** visiting the enemy capitol and calling the **American POWs** there, “**war criminals.**” **Pastor Bob** assured us she has since regretted and profusely apologized for her mistakes in going there and in doing what she did.

How many times in history, in our country and worldwide, have there been **horrendous abuses by those in power**? How many times has the little person, even the whole nation been shafted? Did anyone speak in protest?

Israel was shafted. God’s people had moved to Egypt during a time of famine, **refugees** basically. Their brother, **Joseph**, right hand man to the pharaoh, gave them refuge and they established a new home. The Israelites had grown and prospered in the land of Egypt. Eventually a new pharaoh came to power and decided that they were a threat to the Egyptians. They were forced into slavery. That’s where our reading from Exodus picks up the story.

When the Israelites called out for help in their time of trouble, God:

- “**Observed**” their misery. God had been watching what was going on.
- “**Heard**” their cry. God was listening for their petitions.
- “**Knew**” their suffering. This “**knew**” word means “**intimate relationship with.**” It is not just a “**head**” thing. It is a “**heart**” thing. God literally took the suffering of God’s people, Israel, into God’s own self.
- “**Came down**” to deliver them. God is not stuck in some distant heaven. God moves, is active, comes into our midst to help us.
- “**Brings them up**” into a good land.” God **doesn’t just rescue** us when we are in times of trouble. God moves **beyond rescue to blessing.** Sometimes the bottom seems to be falling out. Then, a year later, what first looked like a total **disaster/loss** has become a **wonderful opportunity** for good to happen in our lives.

This ancient description of God’s work in our world was first shared thousands of years before the time of Jesus. It sounds a lot like what we have seen in **Jesus two thousand years ago** and see of Jesus’ work in our world **still today.** When there is trouble, in personal lives or in nation, **God’s people need to cry out** for

God's help and guidance. We need to speak for what is right. And God will hear and answer our cry.

And how does God move to save the Israelites from slavery? God goes to visit Moses where he is out tending his flock of sheep. God tells Moses that God knows of Israel's suffering in Egypt. Moses already knows too, since his own slave life was saved by God using an Egyptian princess. She adopted Moses away from certain death. He himself later fled from Egypt when, in trying to protect a slave, he killed an Egyptian soldier. Here's the plan, God told Moses:

- Moses, I'm going to send you to rescue my people, your people.
- I will be with you.
- I will give you a shepherd's staff to prove yourself to the people.
- I will give you the power of my Name.
- When you are successful in rescuing the people, you will all worship me.

And what did Moses say?

- Who is sending me? They won't believe just anybody, God.
- I'm not a good speaker.
- Please send someone else.

In these chapters, Moses has **eight reasons** why he is not the right person for the job. God literally enters into a discussion with Moses, honoring/responding to what Moses says. God finally even shifts to what seems like **Plan B** when God agrees to have Moses's brother, **Aaron**, come along to do the talking. But God insists that he will still speak to Moses and then Moses will tell Aaron who will then speak to God's people, Pharaoh, and the people of Egypt. Moses, who thinks he's not a good speaker, holds a powerful conversation with Almighty God and God even changes God's plan in response. **Do you see? Can you believe it?** God **listens** to us. God **considers** what we say. God **responds**. **Our response** to God at least in some small way **influences our future** and the future of our world. **Do you believe that? God ends up getting angry** with Moses for trying to get out of God's saving plan for Israel. But God **moves through him anyway**. God doesn't have to wait for **perfect people** or for **perfect agreement** before God can start to use us to bring about God's good will.

When there is trouble, hurt or need, God chooses to come and rescue. God moves, today, through God's people, you and me. God wants us to help.

- We have excuses, but God is determined.
- We have shortcomings, but God provides what we need.
- We don't have all the answers, but God says "**I will speak through you.**"

I attended a sentencing hearing for a young man from Aitkin this week. He was being sentenced for the death of his infant daughter. Dozens of his friends filled the courtroom to standing room only capacity. I watched as one after another came forward to give character witnesses on his behalf. I am sure that most of them would rather die than speak in public. Several of them shared about their own struggles in life and with the difficulty of child raising. I expect that few of them have had any education past high school, yet they spoke respectfully, passionately and eloquently to try to reduce the length of the prison sentence for their friend. I think God called them to be there, and the judge, sheriff, lawyers.

I sent out an email/prayer chain asking you to pray for that young man, **John Peterson**, and that justice might be done. He gave me permission to ask for your prayers. That day, he received a long, long prison sentence. **Now more cries to God for help and mercy will be needed.** For John Peterson. For his family. For all those involved in this tragic loss of life and now imprisonment. And we need to be praying for all children, all families, law enforcement officers, court officials, jailers, counselors, medical people, teachers, child care providers, coaches, scout leaders. . .

I remember living in a country where we could **disagree with each other and still be friends.** I remember when we could **argue about those disagreements respectfully.** I remember when we could **agree to disagree** and **still work together** for the good of the nation. I remember when **compromise was a good thing.** I'd like to live in a country like that again. We are so fortunate to be living in a free country, the **United States of America.** **We must speak our piece.** We **must stand up for what is right.** We must **treat every person with respect and compassion.** **God helped Israel** in her time of trouble. **God used Moses.** **Today it is our turn.** Come, Lord Jesus, and **move in and through each and every one of us.** **To help and heal individuals, nation and world.** Thanks be to God. Amen.

