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Sermon for the 10th Sunday after Trinity

Sermon Text: Exodus 19:1-6



¹ On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. ² They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, ³ while Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people

of Israel: ⁴ 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

When the people of Israel had left Egypt to wander around the desert, they had a hopeful vision before them. The hope was that they would reach the land flowing with milk and honey. This Biblical concept, "a land flowing with milk and honey" means that a person would reach a place where nothing was lacking. The concept is well known in our vocabulary today too. When someone says: "a land flowing with milk and honey", they are, for example, trying to say: "I finally have success after a long, stressful journey. Or I finally have reached my goal after a difficult challenge!" Oh, how we all long for such a land: A land where there is no corruption or war. A land where there is no hunger or sickness or suffering. A land that I can call my home. But as you all know, the path to the goal or the path home can be difficult and stressful. Perhaps this goal also isn't achievable. Israel realized then that the road to this promised land was long and infinitely difficult. Every day they wandered in the hot sun, every day the same need: too little water, too little food. Already after three months, it was clear that wandering in the desert isn't sustainable and it was impossible for the people to continue on. Some even wanted to go back to Egypt. They would rather be in slavery than remain in the desert. And yet the wandering in the desert was an important time for the Israelites. God had given them the 10 Commandments in this desert. These 10 Commandments are still binding for us today. For in these 10 Commandments, God's Will was defined for His people then and for us today. Every day Moses went up the mountain and listened to God's Will. When he came down again, he told the people what God wanted. And so, one time God explained to Moses that He looked after His people just like an eagle looks after its chicks. Eagles are especially caring parents. The Israelites already knew that. For example, if one of their chicks

falls out of the nest, the mother or father will very quickly fly down to the chick so that the chick lands on the soft wings of its father or mother and then the eagle will carry its chick back to safety again and into the nest. The eagle's goal is that the chick will not be lost, rather that it may stay in its parents' house and under the protection of its parents. With this picture, God states that He will be there for the people of Israel just like that and therefore established a covenant with them. The people should not be lost but should be God's possession and remain under His protection. But God chose this people of Israel for a purpose. They should not just be a people for themselves but a nation of priests for the whole world. It is important that we know what the function of a priest is: A priest's role is to be the mediator between God and people. Everything that he receives from God, he must then pass it on to the people. The people of Israel are just such a nation of priests. Because God distributed the 10 Commandments through the people of Israel. Jesus also came into the world through the people of Israel and brought us back to God on eagles' wings. In 1st Peter, Peter explains that we Christians have now inherited this legacy from Israel. We are a nation of priests that should be a blessing for the whole world:

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10)

The story of Israel and its relationship to God is an example for us Christians today. We also often wander through the desert. We suffer hunger and poverty. Sometimes we dream that we would finally reach this land flowing with milk and honey. But again, and again we are disappointed. We ask ourselves when will God help us. Sometimes we think that God forgot us. We also notice that God makes us responsible and purifies us. The duty to stand up for people and to pass on God's message to the whole world is a heavy responsibility. Often, we want to give up courage. We are like the Israelites and often complain: "Wouldn't it be better if we had remained slaves? Wouldn't it be better if I had never known God?" Yes, sometimes we even give up. We don't want to believe in God anymore and can't pray anymore. We are like the eagle baby that fell out of its parents' nest and now plummets into the abyss. And then without us having done anything, we realize that we didn't fall to the ground and crash. Instead, we feel the strong wings of our God under us. He saved us far beyond our "ability, desire, or understanding." At least we finally then realize it: God chose us and we didn't choose Him! We are God's children because God decided that it should be that way and not because we made the decision! God is the beginning, middle, and end of our life. It is God who also gives us new strength and courage every day of this wandering in the desert. God also will continue to carry us on His strong wings and give us everything we need in our lives. Today, two people have again landed on God's strong wings. Two people were baptized here today. That means that God made a covenant with you. God adopted you now as His children. You received the promise and vow that God will always be with you. From now on, God's name is on and in you. That doesn't mean that from now on your whole life will suddenly be wonderful. It doesn't mean that every problem in your life will be solved and you will only experience good things from now on. Sometimes, you will experience hate and animosity as Christians. And you will be challenged. Perhaps in such a way that you are tempted to hate or despise the people who also hate you. And when that happens, God must remind you that hate isn't part of your nature. You are now God's children and as God's children, you have a special assignment from God. It is now your assignment that you be a blessing to the whole world. You should be priests for the world. How that happens, we can't say at this moment. But one thing we can do and that is that we can look to our Lord Jesus who is

our great High Priest. And this Jesus shows us first of all what it means to be children of God. And He does that by teaching us to speak to God like a father: "Our Father who art in heaven." Jesus' whole life on earth was intended to once again make us children of God and make God our father. Jesus' whole life was intended to bring God close to us once again. Jesus gave Himself up for this purpose. In Jesus, we really first understand what it means to be a priest. Because Jesus gives 100% of Himself to God's Will. Similarly, He gives Himself 100% to the people without holding back. Jesus is completely turned towards God and likewise, He is turned completely towards us too. And that's why Jesus is our true High Priest. In Jesus and on account of His sacrifice on the cross, we draw strength from God. The Holy Spirit who is in us, connects us to God so that we can always call on God in our prayers: "Our Father!" The strength that we receive from Jesus remains but not only with us. We pass it on – to people in our surroundings, to people who also need our forgiveness. We don't always place ourselves and our things in front, rather we place the things of God at the front. We don't live only for ourselves, rather for God and in service to others. What lies ahead for you who were baptized today, as you serve Christ, we can't yet say. What great or small challenges are in store for you, we can't say. But one thing we can now already say. That is that you have a future. God is the great eagle who won't stop watching out for you. When you should fall, He is there and brings you back on His strong wings. And before us is this picture of the promised land. A land where, together with God, we will be priests in His eternal kingdom and where there will be no more stumbling or falling. A land flowing with milk and honey. Amen.