

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Exodus 19:2-8  
Matthew 9:35-10:8  
Preacher: The Rev. R. Bruce Todd

St. Peter's - Lafayette Hill, PA.  
June 15, 2008  
Father's Day

“No *If*'s About It!”

Before we begin, I want to wish all the Dads a “Happy Father’s Day.” Fathers don’t get to feel special anymore. Bill Cosby observed once, that boys grow up spending hours and hours throwing footballs and going to games with their Dads. And when they make it big on the college scene, before the big bowl game they get interviewed, and the first thing they say is, “Hi Mom!!” No, fathers don’t get to feel special anymore.

One Elementary School teacher asked the class how Father’s Day was different from Mother’s Day? One little boy raised his hand and said, “You don’t have to spend as much money for a present on Father’s Day.” No, fathers don’t get to feel special anymore.

But the news on Father’s Day isn’t all bad. The National Center for Fathering conducts Father of the Year Essay Contests in partnership with local schools and sponsoring organizations. Eight contests were held and altogether, over 100,000 school children submitted essays on the topic, “What my Father Means to Me.” Here is a sampling of essays from past contests: A first grader writes, “My dad is the best dad ever. I would kiss a pig for him.”

A fourth grader writes, “Sometimes as a joke I’ll put my stinky socks in his briefcase, so at work the next day he will think of me! He’s always at the concerts and plays that I’m in, even though he lives about an hour away.” A fifth grade girl writes, “. . . You know what else my dad does? He braids my hair. I’m the only girl I know whose dad braids her hair. I think that’s a perfect dad. He already is the world’s greatest dad to me. I just wanted everyone to know that.” A sixth grader writes, “One time I had an assembly and I was a soloist and my dad was in the first row and after my song I smiled at my dad and my dad smiled back - and started crying. That was the best thing I ever saw.”

Okay - maybe - sometimes - Fathers are made to feel special. But how good are fathers at making their children feel special? Do your kids know you love them even when they do something wrong? How many time have you put “conditions” on showing your love? Things like “IF you get good grades you can go to the Prom.” Or “IF you take out the trash and clean your room, you can have the Birthday Party.” IF you don’t Drink - IF you don’t use drugs - IF you refrain from pre-marital sex - IF you don’t get arrested.

We would like to think we show love to our kids unconditionally, but we can’t help putting conditions on it at times. But that’s Life! Life has conditions. You want the diploma? You have to pass the courses. You want to make a living? You have to get a job! You break

the Law? You get arrested and can go to jail. Life has conditions.

I was surprised to discover how many conditions there are in order to become an American Citizen. In fact, most of us would have a tough time meeting these conditions. You can become an American citizen: *IF* you have no Police Record. *IF* you can recite your Constitutional Rights. *IF* you know the Equal Rights Amendment. *IF* you know the first 3 and last 3 Presidents - (and probably predict the next President.) In addition to all this, you can become an American citizen: *IF* you know how many people serve on the Supreme Court. And *IF* you know which President died on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. (For those Trivia buffs - it was Thomas Jefferson in 1826.) These are some of the Conditions for a foreigner to become a citizen of the United States.

So what does it take to become a part of the family of God? What about our Heavenly Father. Does he love us - Unconditionally? Look at today's lesson from Exodus. In the 5<sup>th</sup> verse of Chapter 19 we read: "*IF* you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples." This is the covenant God is making with the People of Israel - his Chosen People. They are "His treasured possession" out of all the people. To point out how special they are to him, God tells Moses to say to them: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you up on Eagle's Wings and brought you to myself." God delivered the Israelites from slavery. The phrase "Bore you up on Eagle's Wings" is another way of saying that they were protected.

If you ever watch an Eagle teach their young how to fly you would see them push the young Eaglet, one by one, out of the nest. She forces each one to use its wings. As it falls from the next high atop the cliff, it screeches with terror and flutters madly. The mother lets the eaglet struggle, but before it reaches that fatal point, she swoops down underneath the struggling eaglet and returns it to safety - to try again.

The Israelites knew this. In this Covenant agreement with God, found in Exodus, God is reminding the Israelites how, in the midst of their struggle with the Egyptians, before they reached the fatal point - God interceded and brought them to safety. But even God gives them a stipulation. *IF* you obey my voice and keep my covenant you will be my treasured possession.

This is really something Special! The Hebrew word for "Special Treasure" is *SeGulla*. This is the word that God uses to describe the people of Israel. *IF* they obey, they will be God's - *SeGulla*. There is a custom from Babylonian Culture where, although the King of Babylon owned everything in the kingdom - he had his *SeGulla* - his own "Special Treasure". Kings usually reigned until their death. But if for some reason a King would be banished - he could take with him his *SeGulla* - his own personal Special Treasure. This is how God was looking at the people of Israel. Since God is God - God already owns everything. But even if something were to keep God from being God - his *SeGulla* would remain his.

Now this is great for the people of Israel. With this being Father's Day - could it be that

God shows partiality among his children? Reading all these texts describing the promises of God to the people of Israel could become a bit discouraging to us Gentiles. But the Gospel is known as “Good News” and that’s what we find in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter. It has a lot of similarities to our text from Exodus, but it is addressed to the Christians. It says: “But you are a chosen race, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy nation, God’s OWN People” (God’s SeGulla) “That you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were No People - But now you are God’s People. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

Here Peter is telling us that we, the Christians, are God’s own Special Treasure - God’s SeGulla. According to the Old Testament Covenant Peter was right - we were No People. But now, through our Baptism into the body of Jesus Christ, we are God’s People - God’s special people. One of the significant differences between this passage from Peter and today’s passage from Exodus, is the Stipulation, or rather the lack of one. Exodus 19 says, “*IF* you will obey my voice and keep my covenant...” In 1<sup>st</sup> Peter there are No “If’s” about it! Peter simply comes right out and tells the Christians, “You ARE a chosen race, a Royal Priesthood, closer to God than any other people.” As Baptized children of God we have been set apart as God’s holy nation.

You can become a Citizen of the United States *IF* you know the Constitution, the names of Presidents, and how many serve on the Supreme court. The Israelites could become God’s special people *IF* they would obey God’s voice and keep God’s Covenant. Christians are different. The *IF* has been removed from God’s promise by his Son. When Jesus Christ died on the cross for us, all the stipulations were removed.

There are no IF’S about it! We ARE God’s Special People! God will bear US on Eagle’s Wings in our modern day wilderness. Today is Father’s Day and our Heavenly Father wants us to know that we are loved unconditionally, because the stipulations have been removed. Removed by HIS Son. And because of Jesus Christ there are no *IF’S* about it!!! Amen.