

**Exodus 19:2–8 (Evangelical Heritage Version)**

**Theme: Keep God’s Covenant with you**

- 1) *Remembering God’s wonderful deliverance.*
- 2) *Understanding who He saved you to be.*

<sup>2</sup>After they set out from Rephidim and came to the Wilderness of Sinai, they camped in the wilderness. Israel camped there in front of the mountain. <sup>3</sup>Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, “This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and to tell the people of Israel: <sup>4</sup>‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup>Now if you will carefully listen to my voice and keep my covenant, then you will be my special treasure out of all the nations, although the entire earth is mine. <sup>6</sup>You will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation.’ These are the words that you are to speak to the Israelites.” <sup>7</sup>Moses went and summoned the elders of the people, and he set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. <sup>8</sup>All the people answered together, “Everything that the LORD has said, we will do.”

Members of Immanuel, I want you to think back to the day you became a confirmed member of this congregation. Think past the gown, gifts and how nervous you were to the final question your pastor asked you during the confirmation rite: *Do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the teachings of God’s Word, to be faithful in the use of the Word and sacrament, and in faith and action remain true to God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as long as you live?* You answered: *I do, and I ask God to help me.*

How good have you been at keeping this promise throughout your life?

If we are honest with ourselves, I think we all have struggled to keep this promise as the LORD would have us keep it. And why is that? All too often we let the busyness of life get in the way - so we sometimes let things slip.

But is that ok? History shows – if we continually let things slip in regard to our relationship with God, we will soon slide out from under the gracious covenant God made with us at our baptism - running away from our heavenly Father like the prodigal son ran away from his Dad, all too eager to join the world.<sup>1</sup>

This is why we do well to remind ourselves of the wonderful covenant God made with us at our baptisms. With God’s words to Israel as our guide, let us be encouraged to **keep God’s covenant with us:** 1) *Remembering how wonderfully God delivered you.* 2) *Understanding who he saved you to be.*

Part One: Remember how wonderfully God delivered you.

Our sermon text takes place just two months after the Israelites left Egypt. A lot had happened in that short period of time. Having seen God demonstrate his power over the Egyptians during the ten plagues, they now got to experience the LORD's earnest care for their safety, as he allowed them to pass through the Red Sea on dry ground, while utterly destroying the army Pharaoh sent to enslave them. When Israel's water supply was too bitter, God made it sweet. When they were low on food, he fed them bread from heaven and provided quail. When their water completely ran out, the Lord had it gush out of a dry desert rock. When attacked by a hostile army, God allowed ill-equipped Israel to have the victory.

Yes, the LORD certainly revealed his power and care during the two months they travelled. And now they arrived: not to the promised land, but to the mountain to which God told Moses to lead the Israelites, when he appeared to him from the burning bush only a year or so earlier.<sup>ii</sup>

We read: <sup>2</sup>*After they set out from Rephidim and came to the Wilderness of Sinai, they camped in the wilderness. Israel camped there in front of the mountain.* <sup>3</sup>*Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and to tell the people of Israel:* <sup>4</sup>*'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.*

The LORD wanted Moses to remind Israel of all that He had done these past two months, as they journeyed from Egypt to Sinai. Why? So they would remember how greatly the LORD loved them, how patient he was during their grumbling, and how faithful he was to his promises.

You see, even though the LORD visibly displayed his faithful love towards the Israelites in both miraculous and awe-inspiring ways, they were prone to forget and let worry control their actions. Why? Because they were travelling in a vast desert unarmed and ill-prepared - surrounded by armed enemies. They didn't have enough food or water for the journey, and there were very few places to restock. Physical, worldly worries kept them from seeing the wonderful ways in which God was delivering them. And isn't the same often also true for us?

What I mean is this: As God loved the Israelites, so he loves us. He powerfully delivered us from our slavery to sin, death and the power of the devil. How? By sending his one and only Son to carry our sins to the cross and die in payment for them. Jesus rose from the grave, thereby proving our forgiveness. The LORD has also personally adopted us as his own dearly loved children through Holy Baptism. He has kept us in our faith, defended us from every danger and continues to provide all that we need for our body and life.

Yes, the LORD certainly shows his love in our life, but do we perceive it? So often we, like the Israelites, allow the worries of the world (career, leisure, personal problems and pursuits, etc. . .) to distract us from acknowledging God's gracious work in our lives. Like the Israelites, we are more quick to grumble and complain, than we are to humble ourselves in repentance and faith – trusting that God will do what he says he will do.

This is why we also need to regularly reflect on God's Gospel promises – remembering the great things he has done for us. Why? Because reflecting on those promises will lead us to see the wonderful love God has for us – a love that brought us to himself, carrying us high above all the spiritual dangers that threaten our souls. Yes, the more we meditate on the grace God has shown us in the past, the more we will grow to love God – trusting that he will keep his soulsaving covenant with us, and help us comprehend the noble purpose for which we were saved.

### Part Two: Understanding who He saved you to be.

The LORD told Moses to tell the Israelites: <sup>5</sup>*Now if you will carefully listen to my voice and keep my covenant, then you will be my special treasure out of all the nations, although the entire earth is mine.*

Having already graciously chosen, saved and delivered Israel, God now invites them to respond to his grace by listening to His Word and keeping (that is believing and clinging to) his gracious covenant to be their God, and they to be his people. Even though God could have picked any number of people or nations, the LORD picked them. Why? Because they were so good, holy and faithful? Truth be told, the past two months in the wilderness showed that Israel was anything but that; as the people constantly complained about how they were better off in Egypt. Then why did the LORD pick them? The same reason he chose us: purely for his mercy's sake. God's grace moved him to love Israel, just as it moved the LORD to love and choose us.

And just as the LORD wanted Israel to respond to his grace by listening carefully to his voice and keeping his covenant, so the LORD wants us to carefully listen to his Word and do the work that he requires, which is this: *to believe in the one he has sent.*"<sup>iii</sup>

Trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and living lives that reflect this forgiveness is how we are kept in God's covenant grace. And why will we do these things? Because, like the Israelites, God has graciously chosen us to be the recipients of his mercy. The promise he made to the Israelites - *You will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation* – he has also promised to us. Where? In the New Testament, where the apostle Peter says of us Christians: *you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*<sup>iv</sup>

You see, the wonderful promise God gave Israel at Mount Sinai to be his Holy people was a foreshadowing of the wonderful promise He would give all believers in Christ – as the apostle John writes: *To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father--to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.*<sup>v</sup>

Yes, the LORD has made us – His Church of believers – to be a holy nation (that is, a people freed from sin) and his royal representatives (priests) on earth. As such, we have a job to do. What is it? *To declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*<sup>vi</sup> Why?

Because *we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*<sup>vii</sup> Jesus himself tells us: *You are the light of the world. . . let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*<sup>viii</sup>

Just as the LORD chose Israel to be his lights of grace on this earth, so the LORD has chosen you. It's for this very reason that, when Moses *set before [Israel] all these words that the LORD had commanded him, all the people answered together, "Everything that the LORD has said, we will do."*

Recalling his wonderful deliverance, and hearing the noble purpose for which the Lord saved them, the Israelites were moved to make a vow of faithfulness, just as God's grace moved you to promise faithfulness at your confirmation.

Sadly, as the rest of the book of Exodus unfolds, we see that the Israelites strayed from their promise, just as we often have from ours. Oh, how pathetic we are – so easily enticed away from the wonderful status God so graciously bestows on us in Christ. LORD, have mercy on us poor sinners, who often stray from your Word.

Thankfully, the LORD had such mercy on us, that He sent his Son to offer the once and for all sacrifice that paid for our sins. Not only that, but the LORD continues to have such mercy on us that He calls us back when we stray – showing us our sins through the preaching of his law, and granting us forgiveness through faith in his Gospel. Yes, the LORD continues to shower us with blessings every day – keeping his covenant of forgiveness life and salvation with us, so that we might remain faithful to him.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Do you remember the confirmation promise you made with God: "faithfully to conform all your life to the teachings of God's Word, to be faithful in the use of the Word and sacrament, and in faith and action remain true to God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as long as you live?" Even though you may have broken this promise in the past, remember why you made it: it was in response to God's great love for you. In the peace of his great forgiveness, ask the LORD to help you keep this promise into the future. How? By using his Word and Sacraments to remember how God wonderfully saved you from your sins – choosing you to be his holy child and royal representative to the world. Understand that this is who you are now, through faith in His son. Rejoice in this fact and live in His grace – proclaiming it to the world as you confess God's holy, saving name by living and speaking according to His Word. Amen

---

<sup>i</sup> Cf. Luke 15:11

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. Exodus 3:12

<sup>iii</sup> John 6:29 NIV84

<sup>iv</sup> 1 Peter 2:9-10 NIV84

<sup>v</sup> Revelation 1:5-6 NIV84

<sup>vi</sup> 1 Peter 2:9 NIV84

<sup>vii</sup> Ephesians 2:10 NIV84

<sup>viii</sup> Matthew 5:14,16 NIV84