

This message was prepared by Rev. Pamela Graf Short for the People of Prayer of the Tontogany Presbyterian Church for the seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, World Communion Sunday. It is also the Sunday when the church will receive Margaret Ruth Johnston Walker-Conner as a member via her re-affirmation of faith in Christ Jesus as her LORD and Savior. Margaret's mother, Ida Ruth Weigman Johnston was a teacher at the Pressly Mission Institute in Egypt in the 1920's. This was a mission effort of the United Presbyterian Church. Thus, references to Egypt serve as examples within this message.

Revelation of Jesus Christ 5:1-14

Then I saw in the right hand of the One seated on the throne
a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals;
and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice,
"Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"
And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll
or to look into it.
And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll
or to look into it.
Then one of the elders said to me,
"Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered,
so that this One can open the scroll and its seven seals."
Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders
a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered,
having seven horns and seven eyes,
which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.
The Lamb went and took the scroll
from the right hand of the One who was seated on the throne.
When the Lamb had taken the scroll,
the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb,
each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense,
which are the prayers of the saints.
They sing a new song:
"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals,
for you were slaughtered
and by your blood you ransomed for God
saints from every tribe and language and people and nation;
you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God,
and they will reign on earth."
Then I looked,
and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne
and the living creatures and the elders;
they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,
singing with full voice,
"Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"
Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea,
and all that is in them, singing,
"To the One seated on the throne
and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"
And the four living creatures said,
"Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshiped.

Philippians 2:1-11

If then there is any encouragement in Christ,
any consolation from love,
any sharing in the Spirit,
any compassion and sympathy,
make my joy complete:
be of the same mind,
having the same love,
being in full accord and of one mind.
Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit,
but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.
Let each of you look not to your own interests,
but to the interests of others.
Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
Christ humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.
Therefore God also highly exalted Jesus and gave him the name that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Our Bible story for today includes crisis and call, anxiety and exaltation.

The problem in the story is two-fold:

There are scrolls to be opened,

but it seems no one is worthy to open them.

I am not sure if this means some tried and could not,

or if it was simply obvious that no one was worthy; kind of like it is obvious to Grandma that if you just came in from making muds pies you are not worthy to stick your hands in the cookie jar.

Being worthy is a common problem.

We are always judging who is worthy and who is not:

Who is worthy to play kick ball on our team.

Who is worthy to come to dinner.

Who is worthy to preside at the communion table. Some of you refuse to take the course on the theology and practice of communion because you think you are not worthy to preside at the table of Jesus Christ. News flash: No one is worthy to preside at the LORD's Table.

I suppose if there is one criteria for presiding at the table it is knowing that you are not worthy.

We like to judge nations on whether or not they are worthy to be our ally.

We tend to see nations in very clear cut terms:

They are either good or evil;

civilized or barbarian;

humane or malicious.

If we are not convinced by looking at our own mixed national history that such dichotomies do not hold up, then let's take a brief look at the stories of Egypt in the Bible.

Now it just so happens that one of Noah's grandson's was named "Egypt".

It would seem that he and his family settled along the Southern coast of the Mediterranean and the delta of the Nile River, a lush and beautiful land of plenty. Because of its rich black soil, this place was almost always the last to suffer famine and so on many occasions it became a place of nourishment for the starving.

Yet, what this nation is most remembered for in Biblical terms, is its genocide against the Jewish people.

Moses of course is best known for being God's instrument in the Exodus, as God delivered the people from the slavery of Egypt.

You would think this would pretty much seal the fate of Egypt in the eyes of God, but what happens when baby Jesus needs a safe place to hide?

The angel tells Joseph to take the baby and his mother to where? Egypt!

Here's my point:

Whether God judges you as an individual person or as a part of a whole nation,

whether you ponder your own life in terms of the good you have done or the sins you have hidden,

whether you put on one side of the scales your doubt and on the other side your faith—

your life, your story, your nation, your world cannot be put into tidy piles of who is to be lauded and who is not.

You see in the end, the Grandma does not at all trust the mud-pie makers to rightly handle her cookies.

But neither does she shoo them away.

Instead she lovingly takes them into the bath and scrubs them from head to toe and then feeds them cookies and milk—not because they are worthy,

but simply because they are loved.

And so we return to today's Bible story.

The Root came out of David's line,

not because David was moral,

but because God keeps God's promises.

The Lion of the Tribe of Judah

came not because we were well-trained,

but because we were in need of a Savior.

No, the Lamb of God came not because we are worthy, but simply because we are loved.

And so we gather around this table this morning with gratitude and humility with those from every tribe and language and people and nation.

We eat and drink not because we are worthy,

but because we are called by our Redeemer who liveth, Jesus Christ—

the One whose side was pierced for our sins

and wounded for our failures;

the Lamb who was slaughtered so that we might be made whole;

the One who, through the Cross and Resurrection conquered the power of sin and death and broke open the way for life eternal;

the One who sings "come by my side".

Come! People of Tontogany!

We are called by the saints and the angels to remember and not forget that there is but One who is worthy to receive power
and wealth
and wisdom
and might
and honor
and glory
and blessing!"

Now may our Redeemer who liveth
The One who is worthy
Welcome you in hearty affection
Gather you in joyful belonging
Walk with you in loving kindness
And supply you with
power
and wealth
and wisdom
and might
and honor
and glory
and blessing!"
Here and in Egypt and in all creation
Now and forevermore.
Amen.