

Sermon for 10.9.17

In the Old Testament reading we hear step by step instructions given by God to Moses and Aaron for the ancient Hebrews to follow in their journey from slavery to freedom.

Each step will be recalled over and over again in future times and rituals, so that not one generation who follow in time will forget any part of it, and so that each succeeding generation will be enabled to participate through the collective memory in the escape from Pharaoh's domination.

The Christian faith follows the same tradition of remembering and participating.

In every Eucharist we remember how we were brought from slavery to freedom through the cross of Christ.

We recall the steps in the great thanksgiving prayer: *On the night he was betrayed Jesus took bread blessed and broke it – take eat this is my body given for you –do this in remembrance of me. In the same way He took a cup of wine blessed it and said this is my blood shed for you and for many*

And when we partake of the body and blood of Christ, we participate in the suffering, dying and rising with Christ. – the freedom that has been won for us.

The steps about how we are to live in that freedom is found in the way of Jesus Christ proclaimed in the New Testament.

In the gospel passage today the parable of the stray sheep speaks about pastoral care for all – even those who stray from the flock.

Now Jesus taught in parables so that people could view God's kingdom differently from the accepted standards of the world.

The parables were meant to give a broader vision into God's compassionate and inclusive ways in the kingdom.

The thrust of the message today is that the stray sheep – the odd one out, is not to be despised by others or viewed as an outcast from society –

because he or she is noticed by God and is as valuable to God as any other.

In fact God knows and cares enormously for that one.

The gospel writer, drives this point home with the words, *I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my father in heaven.*

The concept of angels would have immediately rung a bell with his Jewish audience, for at that time, there was a highly developed angelology among the Jews.

Nations had their angels, individuals had their angels, and the rabbis believed that even the flowers had angels to represent them before God.

Angels are also a large part of our Christian faith.

We remember it was the Angel Gabriel who visited Mary and told her she was to conceive and bear a son.

The angels waited on Jesus in the desert after his baptism.
They were in the tomb after Jesus was raised.

The parable of the stray sheep carries a timeless message.

Think for a moment about our own society and how the stray sheep – the odd one out, is treated.

How do we view such a person? Perhaps we see them as the unfortunate, or way out, or even as someone who have made bad choices in life.

But what if we were to see them in a different way without any judgement at all.

What if we were to see them as the known and the loved by the God who is constantly visited by their personal angel?

If we saw them from this perspective how then would we treat them? The parable invites us into a broader inclusive vision that is a reality in the kingdom of God.

Today's gospel passage points to a genuine concern for the individual.

Yet this concern also extends to the collective flock as well.

Matthew details a process that indicates patience and perseverance to ensure the accountability of each member. The local group of believers is ultimately to function as a court for the discipline of its members.

Exclusion from the community is the last and drastic step to be taken when all else fails, and the welfare of the community is at stake.

The journey from slavery to freedom for those who follow Christ has many steps.

All lead to a life to the fullest in love. Along the journey we remember how our freedom was won and at the Eucharist we partake in the victory as we die and rise with Christ.

And as we journey personally, we remember that love is the fulfilling of the law.

As we journey collectively, we are sustained by the participation of ourselves with Jesus, for when 2 or 3 of us are gathered in his name, there Jesus will be also.

The Lord be with you.