

Exodus 19:16-19
A Trumpet to Send
Rev. Jonathan Cornell
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We've been following the Israelites on their journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land, and we've come to the climactic point in the Exodus story. We're at the foot of Mt. Sinai, the Mountain of God. Soon, God will give the 10 Commandments to Israel, the ten words with which God binds himself to Israel and makes them his people.

Our text this morning is right before these 10 Commandments, in chapter 19. As we read, what we'll realize is that this is a very dramatic passage. It reminds me of those people, whose sanity might be questionable, who chase storms. Or who, when a tornado is coming or a hurricane is bearing down on them, take out their cell phone and video the events rather than run for cover. This morning's passage is kind of like a YouTube video in this way.

What we see in Exodus 19 is a God who made all things good, breaking into a world that no longer is. A God who comes in pure goodness and holiness to dwell among his people, to make his home with them. And it's a terrifying experience. It's as if the very foundations of creation can no longer contain, the earth is shaking, clouds of thunder and lightning are raging. It makes you want to head for cover as the Holiness—not this domesticated God that we've created, gentle Jesus meek and mild, or the "Jesus is my boyfriend" theology we see today—no, this story makes us want to run for cover. Except for the fact that there is a rising sound of music. A trumpet begins to emerge from this great mountain, Mt. Sinai.

Would you open up your Bibles with me, either the one you brought with you or the one in the pew racks in front of you, to Exodus chapter 19. We're going to be reading verses 16-19.

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.

A trumpet is a priestly instrument.

I heard a story this week about an evening in a New York City Jazz Club where Jazz legend Wynton Marsalis was playing backup. During the fourth song, he stepped forward. The name of the song was "I Don't Stand a Ghost of a Chance with You." It was a piece that could bring out the sadness in any scene. Marsalis appeared deeply attuned to

its melancholy. He performed the song in murmurs and sighs, at points nearly talking the words in notes. When he came to the climax, Marsalis played the final phrase, the title statement, in tones that lingered in the air a bit longer.

“I...Don’t...Stand...A...Ghost...of...a...chance...”

The room was silent until at the most dramatic point, someone’s cell phone went off, blaring a rapid singsong melody in electronic bleeps. People giggled, picked up their drinks, the moment was ruined. Marsalis, though, arched his eyebrows then replayed the silly melody note for note. Then repeated it, improvising variations of it. The audience slowly came back to him. In a few minutes, he resolved the improvisation which changed keys, then slowed down to a ballad tempo, finally ending right back where he left off: “with...you.” The ovation was tremendous.

I don’t know about you, but there are a lot of wrong notes in my life. A lot of chinsy, fake, discordant notes in my life. Things that I say or do to my family or my friends that come across just as disruptive cell phone ring in the middle of something great. I sort of wish there was a trumpet in the background to make all of my wrong notes right. The trumpet has the ability to take the wrong notes of a song and bend them back into the melody, making them a part of a beautiful piece of music. The trumpet is a priestly instrument.

God gave Israel priests to do this for them; they played the trumpet for the people of Israel. It was a shofar, a ram’s horn—one of the oldest musical instruments. You can’t play a lot of notes, but you can play it loud, and that’s what a good priest would do. He would play it loud to summon all the people to the worship of the Great God Yahweh. When David brought the ark to Jerusalem and danced in front of it, the music was the music of trumpets played by the priests; when Solomon was coronated as king, priests played trumpets; when the Jerusalem temple was dedicated, 120 priests played trumpets and smoke filled the temple. God was there, God showed up.

God is calling us to be a nation of priests, but before we do that we need to have a Great Priest. Jesus is our Great High Priest. And if you want to know what Jesus is doing in your life, you need to know what it means to be a priest. There are 5 actions which a priest carries out:

1. **Representation:** comes from the people, he’s one of them, putting on a robe with 12 stones for the 12 tribes and he would go into the temple on their behalf.
2. **Consecrations:** there would be washings and a small amount of blood on the right thumb or right toe.
3. **Substitution:** would put hands on the head of an animal to be sacrificed on behalf of the people. What the priest was doing was transferring the guilt of the people onto another representative. The animal’s death might represent their death, that the judgment

of a holy God toward a sinful people might not need to be inflicted upon those whom God loves.

4. **Intercession:** priest would move into the temple, the three courts into the holy places, and now in that space he makes intercession on behalf of the people.

5. **Blessing:** priest goes back out into the courts to the people and declares the blessing on the people. From Numbers 6, “May the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord make his face to shine upon you, may the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”

Here’s why: because God wants to put his name upon the people. “You are my people. I have given you a name and a purpose. I have given you my presence to guide and sustain you. And I have sent you forward to live in my name.” This is what it means to live as God’s people represented by a priest: representation, consecration, substitution, intercession, and blessing.

Jesus is for us, on our behalf, the Great High Priest. Jesus, on Palm Sunday, the day we celebrate today, made his way into Jerusalem to the temple, welcomed not as priest but as a king, riding on a donkey, with palm branches waving (palm branches were a symbol of victory and peace in a nation), and he came in to the shouts of Hosanna (literally “Save, please”). So on Palm Sunday, Jesus made his way to the courts of the temple, but not just the Jerusalem Temple, but the heavenly temple on our behalf to be our priest.

To represent us: He is the Son of God, but he is also the Son of Man. Like us in every way except for sin. Bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, God has taken on your humanity to be our representative, and he takes your name upon his heart into the holy of holies.

Jesus would consecrate himself, not with blood, but with a life of perfect obedience. He says in the High Priestly prayer in John 17, “I sanctify myself for their sake.” Jesus makes himself holy, because we never could.

Then he ascends up to the hill of crucifixion. The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He makes a substitution on your behalf and for mine. But that’s not all, he not only dies, but rises from the dead on Sunday. And when Mary comes and meets him that first Easter morning she does something interesting, she grasps for him. Jesus says, “Do not hold onto me for I have not yet ascended, I have not yet gone up to my God and to your God.” Jesus goes to make intercessions on our behalf to the Father.

Just as the chief priest ascends to the Holy of Holies to make intercession on behalf of the people, so Jesus ascends to the heavenly realm to make intercessions on your behalf and on mine. He will pray for us, for the world. He will fold your spirit led prayers into his own. He will bend your wrong notes and the missteps you come before him to confess into himself in his sacrificial offering and will bend those glaring wrong notes into a part of his beautiful song of redemption.

And then he will bless us. Jesus sets his name upon us. On that very same Resurrection Sunday, Jesus will come to his disciples in the upper room and he will speak a word of blessing upon them. He will say “Peace, peace be with you.” And then he breathes upon them and they receive the Holy Spirit, so that the name of Jesus becomes your name, when you receive his blessing.

That’s the name we spoke over Jakobe in the words of Baptism this morning. It’s the name that was spoken over you and given to you when you were baptized, and you now remember them for yourself.

God has given you a great priest who can take the vilest of offenses, the most wretched of actions, the most dreaded memories you have from this life, when you crossed lines you never thought you’d cross, when we gave up, the times when we said something so hurtful, the times when we withheld help from someone who needed it, all of those ugly moments from our past can now be folded into the melody of a Savior, who plays beautiful music, who reveals great grace.

And as I mentioned a few weeks ago, it’s not just enough to have your life’s wrong notes bent into beautiful ones, full of grace and the kindness of a Savior. It’s not just enough to be set free. The question I leave you with today is this one: now that you have that word of blessing spoken over your life, how will your life be different? And that is what Holy Week leaves us with. Having made this journey in the week before us, experiencing the community, generosity of Maundy Thursday, enduring with Jesus the agony of Good Friday, and witnessing the wonder and opportunity of Easter Sunday, where will we go from here? That is the exciting part, the unwritten part, the part you get to improvise and create on your own. But know that you don’t have to do it alone, for you have a great high priest consecrating, representing, substituting and interceding on your behalf.