

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
Worship This Week June 15, 2025

SCRIPTURE INTRO – Israel was just beginning its mission to take control of The Promised Land and had just emerged victorious after its first military battle. This included the famous scene in which the army advanced when Moses, standing on a hill overlooking the battlefield, had his arms in the air holding his staff. When his arms were lowered, the Israelites lost ground. We learned three things from this. First, it represented a posture of prayer – a visible declaration of inviting the Lord to unleash His power. Second, such prayer must be constant and never be paused. Third, prayer must not only be done alone but in the company of other believers. The fact that the elderly Moses needed Aaron and Hur to stand with him and hold up his arms spoke volumes of our need to support one another. Fresh from that victory, Moses receives an official visitor from a neighbouring nation.

SCRIPTURE – Exodus 18:1-12

Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, heard about everything God had done for Moses and his people, the Israelites. He heard especially about how the Lord had rescued them from Egypt. 2 Earlier, Moses had sent his wife, Zipporah, and his two sons back to Jethro, who had taken them in. 3 (Moses' first son was named Gershom, for Moses had said when the boy was born, "I have been a foreigner in a foreign land.") 4 His second son was named Eliezer, for Moses had said, "The God of my ancestors was my helper; he rescued me from the sword of Pharaoh.") 5 Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, now came to visit Moses in the wilderness. He brought Moses' wife and two sons with him, and they arrived while Moses and the people were camped near the mountain of God. 6 Jethro had sent a message to Moses, saying, "I, Jethro, your father-in-law, am coming to see you with your wife and your two sons." 7 So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law. He bowed low and kissed him. They asked about each other's welfare and then went into Moses' tent. 8 Moses told his father-in-law everything the Lord had done to Pharaoh and Egypt on behalf of Israel. He also told about all the hardships they had experienced along the way and how the Lord had rescued his people from all their troubles. 9 Jethro was delighted when he heard about all the good things the Lord had done for Israel as he rescued them from the hand of the Egyptians. 10 "Praise the Lord," Jethro said, "for he has rescued you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh. Yes, he has rescued Israel from the powerful hand of Egypt! 11 I know now that the Lord is greater than all other gods, because he rescued his people from the oppression of the proud Egyptians." 12 Then Jethro,

Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God. Aaron and all the elders of Israel came out and joined him in a sacrificial meal in God's presence.

MESSAGE – This is Jethro's second appearance. We first met Jethro in Exodus 2. Moses was on the run after killing the Egyptian who attacked a fellow Israelite. Moses the fugitive hit the road and arrived in the land of Midian, where he sat beside a well. A group of sisters arrived to get water but were chased away by the other shepherds. Moses came to their rescue, then drew water for them. The sisters happened to be daughters of the priest of Midian. When their father heard the story, he took him in. Eventually, he welcomed Moses to the family and gave his daughter Zipporah to be his wife. Their first son was named Gershom, meaning, "I have been a foreigner in a foreign land."

Who are these Midianites? This tribe was among many that descended from Abraham, but they were not from the official royal lineage of Abraham and Sarah, from whom we get Isaac. After Sarah died, Abraham married a woman named Keturah and from that union, we get the Midianites. The Midianites were cousins of Israel. The Midianites were sometimes enemies of Israel. Joseph was sold as a slave by his brothers to a group of traders from Midian on their way to Egypt. Midianite kings stood in the way of Israel as they tried to claim the Promised Land. Midianites were seen as corrupters of the Hebrew faith. When men of Israel married Midianite women, they gave up their faith and followed the beliefs and practices of the Midians. And so on. Despite all this, they were still part of God's plan.

Moses – who was powerfully called and anointed by God to rescue and lead his Chosen People during a critical era, when the Nation of Israel was founded, the law and the 10 commandments were established – was aided by a foreign people when he escaped from Egypt. This is noteworthy. Keep in mind that the Midianites were still children of Abraham. Yahweh (Abraham's God) was known to them, although they may not have all believed in Him.

Moses ended up living with Jethro's family and the Midianite people for 40 years before the Lord appeared in the Burning Bush and called him to return to Egypt to be God's agent and rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into The Promised Land.

In Exodus 18, today's scripture, it's a family reunion. Today's message is the first of two parts. This week, we see Jethro's spiritual awakening. Next week, we will see how God uses this new believer to further help establish the nation.

The Exodus of Israel from Egypt was such a powerful series of events that word naturally spread. Fresh from Israel's first military victory, Moses' father-in-law appears, bringing Moses' wife and sons. This was a family reunion. We don't know why Zipporah and the sons went back to Midian. Perhaps it was during the plagues. But this is just speculation.

Moses would have had a mutually trusting relationship with his father in law. Having been raised in all the wisdom and education of Egypt – a world superpower – Moses would have been an impressive figure to the leader of a nation of nomads. Midian had no pyramids, military might or great learning. They were shepherds who wandered. At the same time, Moses would have learned about the importance of family and hard work.

When Jethro arrived, Moses "bowed low and kissed him." This was a sign of respect, even submission. Moses was the leader of a great nation – many millions of people looked to him for leadership and wisdom. He was God's anointed one for this time in history. And yet he deferred to Jethro, who was not even a Hebrew. The two leaders sat down for a face-to-face conversation in the tent, out of public view. Moses told his father in law the entire story, the hardships, the victories, how God's hands did miraculous things and "rescued his people from all their troubles."

What follows is remarkable. Jethro "was delighted when he heard about all the good things the Lord had done for Israel as he rescued them from the hand of the Egyptians. 'Praise the Lord,' Jethro said, 'for he has rescued you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh. Yes, he has rescued Israel from the powerful hand of Egypt! I know now that the Lord is greater than all other gods, because he rescued his people from the oppression of the proud Egyptians.' "

Note the words, "greater than all other gods." Jethro recognized many gods. His faith was what we might label today as a new age spirituality. The Midian people are mentioned many times in the Koran – the Muslim scriptures. Upon hearing Moses' testimony, Jethro became a believer. "The Lord is greater!" Jethro, therefore, is possibly the Bible's first convert.

Jethro then led a worship service that included a burnt offering and sacrifices. A burnt offering is fully consumed by fire and offered in tribute to the Lord; in a sacrifice, the blood and fat are offered to the Lord and the meat is eaten in a fellowship of thanksgiving. Aaron and the 70 elders of Israel joined; although not mentioned, Moses apparently concurred. The participants ate together “in the presence of God” (v. 12). It must have been a magnificent meal and experience.

Throughout the Bible, we are commanded to separate our faith practices and beliefs from other religions. This is essential because God places a great importance on obedience and being right with Him. However, we must never confuse this with being separate from the people who hold other faiths.

We can be helped by people of other faiths. We can also learn from them, particularly if we have the same primary source. Does not mean they are on the correct spiritual path. But we are all created in God's image. We must remain true to Christ. Do not apologize for that. But love every person from every other nation and faith. Show them what the Lord has done and is doing. You may not convince them on your own testimony to follow Christ. But by loving them, sharing our hope with them, we open the door for The Holy Spirit to do the rest.

A minister friend was once praying with a hospital patient in a semi private room. When she was finished, the curtain was pulled back by the man in the other bed, who had been listening closely. He was from a different faith. During his time in hospital he had been exposed to prayers from other Christians. He told the pastor that without a doubt the prayers lifted up by followers of Christ were much more effective. So he invited this pastor to pray for him right there on the spot.

Jethro was a professional faith leader. He had a life of prayer and practice in his faith of many gods. But when compared to the experience of the Hebrews, his faith paled. It was a poor substitute.

We live in a pluralistic culture in which all faith expressions are welcomed. There is nothing wrong with that for the simple reason that it is a fundamental part of a free nation. If Christians want freedom to worship and practice then we must allow others to do the same.

The trouble is that in this inclusive and welcoming nation, we back down on our faith for fear of offending others. We buy into the false notion that one's faith should be kept private. That is actually a lie spread by Satan.

I once had a conversation with an imam, a Muslim priest, who said he had no problem with Christians declaring their faith publicly. If you truly believe, then by all means, share it. I was being encouraged to evangelize not by another Christian but by a Muslim. The principle at play is this: if it's just words and is not founded on truth, then it will go nowhere. It will have no power. But if it is true, it will stick. It will grow. It cannot be stopped.

Like the Israelites, we are invited to keep trusting in God's promises. Rest in the assurance that we are forgiven and are living new lives. Be bold and confident in the fact that the Lord is with us to the end of the age and the Holy Spirit is prepared to teach us, and empower our gifts. This is real. "The gates of Hades shall not prevail" against my church, the Lord declared (Matthew 16:18).

Until the day that The Lord will return, the enemy continues to be at work, spreading lies and doing his best to divide the church and sow seeds of doubt. But those who know The Lord can hold their heads high. The Son of God walks with us when we submit to Him and we strive to be in His will. It was the same with Moses and the 12 tribes. When they obeyed, when their arms were lifted up in prayer, when they remembered all that God had done and the Promise that was made, they would enjoy victory, protection, provision and peace.

Boldly proclaim the name of the Lord, tell of the great things he has done for us – not only as a church but as individuals. Tell others about the miracles and the supernatural strength that He grants through his Spiritual power and peace. See others not as enemies but rather as children of God, created in his image, who are waiting for their eyes to be opened and to enter the Kingdom. Amen.