

Lent 3 – March 23, 2025
Text: Exodus 8:16-24
Theme: What Will It Take?

I have good news for people who are setting Teslas on fire and having blind rages on TikTok. God is greater than President Trump and Elon Musk! God is greater than Vladimir Putin too. And, by the way, God is greater than all the world leaders put together, and God was greater than Pharoah too. You and I both know that, but the Egyptian people, and particularly Pharoah himself, did not know that. Pharoah believed that he was a god. That seems to be a great temptation for very rich and powerful people. In recent years we have seen politicians, actors, sports figures, and C.E.O.'s speak as though they were all-knowing. Humility seems to be an abandoned virtue in our time.

God sent Moses to tell Pharoah that he was not in fact god and that the one true God required him to let God's people go. Instead of receiving God's gift of His people to Egypt with thanksgiving, this Pharoah had chosen to oppress them and enslave them. They did not believe that he was a god and they were numerous so they were a threat to his fragile ego and his even more fragile power. God had sent His people to Egypt some 400 years earlier because there was plenty of food in Egypt and there was a famine in Israel.

The arrangement had worked well for some time. God's people lived symbiotically with the Egyptians, but now they were enslaved and that was not acceptable to God. Never forget that God is watching. He is not a disconnected deity sitting off in space somewhere. He is always with us. He has been since the beginning of time, but He is patient and because He exists outside of time, He seems to us slow to respond sometimes. 100 years is the blink of an eye for God. But, if we read our Bible, we see that eventually He always responds and takes care of us.

He could have just wiped Egypt off the face of the earth. But God is gracious and compassionate even to people who reject Him. That is the fundamental rule. God loves everyone. That does not mean that there are no consequences for disobeying Him. Everyone faces consequences for disobedience. Sometimes they are obvious consequences and sometimes they are hidden but I guarantee you that they are there. In the case of Egypt, they were obvious consequences. They came in the form of plagues, 10 of them to be exact: blood, frogs, gnats, flies, death of livestock, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and death of the firstborn. Today, our text talks about plagues three and four.

Gnats came up from the dust where Aaron struck the ground with his staff. All the Egyptians were covered in gnats. Some

translators say lice which would be even worse. God demonstrates that He alone has power over the earth. While the Egyptian magicians had been able to duplicate turning water to blood and the curse of frogs, they could not duplicate the gnats, and they called it “the finger of God.” They were right. But Pharaoh’s heart remained hardened.

So next God sent flies. Moses notes this time that the Hebrews in Goshen, the part of Egypt where God’s people lived, were untouched by the flies. But the Egyptians were covered as well as all their livestock. The word for flies means any biting stinging bug, so this was painful, not just a nuisance.

Our text ends there. We know that there were six more plagues before Pharaoh finally relented but the reading for today just picks up gnats and flies. I wonder why the compilers of the lectionary decided on gnats and flies. If we look to the Prayer of the Day, we see that we prayed,

“O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy, be gracious to all who have gone astray from Your ways and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of Your Word.” We see that God desires to be

gracious and merciful and to bring people who have strayed back to Him. How does God do that? Often with gnats and flies.

Remember that while the gnats and flies were very irritating to the Egyptians and probably somewhat painful, they did not kill them. The plagues become progressively worse until the last one that finally broke Pharaoh. Likewise in the Gospel, you see Jesus casting out a demon and some of the people wanted to believe that Jesus was a demon. Jesus says to them something very similar to what the Egyptian magicians said.

“But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” The finger of God. The finger of God brings joy, peace, and deliverance, but to get us there, sometimes the finger of God brings gnats and flies. When you find yourself beset by gnats and flies, perhaps it is a good time to ask what God is showing you. Remember that God is the master teacher. He is not blind. He is not detached. He is right there with you in the midst of the biting and stinging insects. But He will not deliver you just because you whine and complain. The gnats and the flies are designed to teach you and to drive you back toward God.

When you are beset by gnats and flies, take the opportunity to examine your life. Ask yourself if you have been keeping His law to

the best of your ability. Get you catechism out, blow the dust off of it and open it to the 10 Commandments and their meanings. Think about how you have failed to keep them. If you are honest with yourself and with God, you very likely will discover the reason for the gnats and the flies. God is trying to prevent you from receiving a far worse fate than gnats and flies. He did not want the Egyptians to get to the tenth plague. He would have loved it if Pharoah had chosen to drop to his knees and worship the one true God who had been present in His people in Egypt for 400 years! He would have loved to bring Egypt into the family of God.

The gnats and the flies are not pleasant but they are gifts. They are designed to protect us from our own foolishness and drive us back to God. Do not think of the gnats and flies as punishment from God. God does not punish us. When a shepherd drives his sheep to green pastures and still waters, sometimes he uses his staff to push the sheep in one direction or another. So, God uses all manner of things to drive us towards Him. Thank God. Without Him, we would wander off into danger and spiritual death. So, when the gnats irritate and the flies bite, pay attention. They are like guardrails on a mountainous highway. God is using them to protect you from something far worse.

Jesus died on the cross to forgive us all our sins, but we must have faith to grasp that gift. Faith is the hand that grasps the gift. Faith was given to us at our baptisms and through God's Word. The gnats and the flies protect us from forgetting to care for our faith. They remind us to worship, read God's Word and receive His body and blood lest our faith become weak and frail. God drives us constantly toward His Word and Sacrament because He loves us and has no intention of letting our faith die until we are safe with Him in paradise.