

Exodus 7:8-13 – Pentecost 14

What if I took this staff and threw it down in front of you this morning and it suddenly turned into a large snake? Would that grab your attention? Do you think you would listen to what I had to say? Might you stay awake and even listen to the whole sermon. Today, we have the example of Pharaoh who would not even listen after seeing just this. What if I prepared a sacrifice for God this morning and offered a simple prayer like Elijah did when he asked that the Lord God let it be known that He is the one true God and that I am His servant? What if the Lord suddenly sent fire from heaven to lick up the entire sacrifice? Would you pay attention to my words? Or would you like Ahab and Jezebel close your ears to what I had to say and run me out of town? What if I took this one piece of bread and fed all of you with it so each person here is able to eat as much as they wanted? That would certainly leave each of you taking notes and hanging on my every word, right? That would be enough to keep you as my followers, wouldn't it? Yet, as we see in our Gospel reading many people start to leave Jesus saying His words are a bit too difficult to accept. Many turn away and no longer listen to the one who provided them with a miraculous meal.

How about this? What if I raised someone from the dead? That's right what if I walked right up to a grave and commanded: "*Lazurus, come out!*" Wouldn't you love me then and listen to me? Remarkably, not even this is enough for some. As Jesus explained in the story of the rich man and Lazurus: "***If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets (to the Word of God), they will not be convinced if someone rises from the dead***" (Luke 16). Many did not listen to Jesus but hated Jesus even more after He raised another Lazurus from the dead.

You see it always was, is, and will be about the Word of God. These people saw, but they did not hear. Even God's mighty acts, be they in nature or in an extraordinary miracle, do not create faith in those who only see. We need to hear and hear and hear the Word of the Lord, for faith comes from hearing the message. So as the Lord speaks today, and every time the Lord speaks to us through His Word, I pray we love to and learn to eagerly and always: **Listen to the Lord!**

This is a pretty well known portion of history due to movies such as *The Ten Commandments*. God called a reluctant Moses from a burning bush to lead His people Israel out of slavery in Egypt. He equipped Moses with his brother Aaron to be his spokesman and miraculous signs so Pharaoh would know the Lord sent him. But the Lord also knew this would not be an easy sell getting Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. In fact this is probably the clearest example in Scripture of someone hardening his heart against the Lord and His Word to the point when the Lord finally hardens Pharaoh's heart.

Moses was now 80 years old and Aaron 83 years of age when they came before Pharaoh. So far the results were disastrous. Moses and Aaron first come before Pharaoh saying: "***This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so they may hold a festival to me in the desert.'***" Do you remember Pharaoh's reply? "***Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go.***" Not only did he refuse to let them go but Pharaoh called them lazy and said from now on the Israelites had to find their own straw and still make the same number of bricks. When they couldn't keep up the Israelites foremen were beaten. Now

the Israelites were upset with Moses and Aaron. They cried out to the Lord and the Lord tells Moses to go back to Pharaoh and tell him everything the Lord had to say.

*The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Perform a miracle,’ then say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh,’ and it will become a snake.” So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts: Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs. Yet Pharaoh’s heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.*