

USED CAR LOT RELIGION Exodus 17:1-7; Romans 12:1-2a
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston WV 3rd Sunday of Lent (March 23) 2014

Exodus 17:1-7

¹ All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ⁴ So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵ And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Romans 12:1-2a

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, ...

The Worship Committee, after studying the scriptures for Lent, decided that Lent is about a journey. On the first week, we began in the wilderness, with Jesus. Last week we talked about **TRUST** necessary to make the Journey. Today we are talking about the **TRANSFORMATION** that must needs occur on the journey.

"Dagnabit!" Freda exclaimed as the car stalled, just after the light turned from red to green. It didn't take her as long to recognize and realize this time, as it did the first time. That first time ... how long ago was it, now? ... she had been confused and unsure of herself. The cars behind her had begun to honk their horns in disgust, which only added to her consternation and frustration.

Now, she understood immediately what had happened, put her foot back on the brake, put the gear shifter into Park, restarted the car, pulled the gear shifter into Drive, and started out. It was now down to a two – three second process, accomplished with practiced refinement. Most of the time, the people behind her did not even notice that the ritual had occurred.

But, Sarah, sitting next to her, had never seen it happen before. "What was that all about?"

"Oh, there's something wrong with either the electronic ignition or the carbeurator," Freda told her.

"And *how* do you know that? Do you even know what 'electronic tradition' or 'carbon-raider' are?"

"It's electronic *ignition* and *carbeurator*, and no, I don't know what they are, except that they are what's causing the blankety-blank car to shut down at a stop light. And I happen to know that because I took it to the mechanic down at *Trust Me Motors*, who wanted \$800 to fix it. And for a car that's half as old as my med school student daughter, I'm not about to give Mr. *Trust Me* that kind of money."

"So what are you going to do?"

“Well, I can wait until I get that kind of money scraped up to get it fixed – unlikely; OR I can buy another car. But it’s hard for me to even think about *THAT*.”

“Freda, this car is, what, 14 years old? How many miles?”

“It’s *fifteen* years old and it only has 132,000 miles on it. But the main thing is: it’s paid for.”

“How often does this happen?”

“Can’t tell you that. It’s a mystery to me. No warning, at all. Sometimes it does it. Some times it doesn’t. Although, it does seem to be happening more often.”

The women drove on, through three more stop lights and stop signs, before it happened again. The next time, though, the normal ritual was attenuated. It took several cranks on the starter, with the battery seemingly weakening. The starter finally caught and the engine started, after about five or six attempts. There was some horn blowing this time.

“Freda, you’ve got to do something about this. Someday, you are going to get stopped and it won’t start, at all ... just saying.”

After Freda had dropped off Sarah at her home, and got home, herself, she began to think about what her friend had told her. She opened up the newspaper and began to look at the advertisements for the used car lots. This car was fifteen years old, but it had been four years old when she bought it. She wondered how much cars cost these days.

She discovered that in the past eleven years, the cost of cars had gone up quite a bit ... much more than she had expected. But ... Sarah might just be right. Maybe she did need to accept reality. What she was driving these days just wasn’t doing the job. She probably was going to need to get a new ... or new to her ... car.

That weekend, Freda invited Sarah to go with her car shopping. She was really quite amazed at what she discovered. Two things, mainly.

- (1) The people who wanted to sell her a car were very nice. They welcomed her on the car lot. They were very solicitous and helpful in answering her questions, and giving her coffee and cookies to eat. Someone greeted her at the door. Someone else handed her a piece of paper that described what was available. And someone else invited her to test drive whatever vehicle on the lot that appealed to her.
- (2.) All this could be done for free. The price of the car, however, was not free. It seemed more than she was willing to pay. She would get right to the point of buying – getting a trade-in figure; getting the financing worked out; all the way up to putting her signature on the contract. Then she would back away; getting buyer’s remorse before she became a buyer. She’d say, “No, no, I’ve got to sleep on this. I don’t want to hurry.”

One time, early on in her shopping, before Sarah quit going with her any more, Freda went back to the same car lot, after earlier spending one whole afternoon there. The people were just as friendly as the week before ... well she thought that, perhaps, they were not *quite* as friendly. Maybe it was just her imagination. Maybe she was just projecting that onto them. But, she decided that if *they* couldn’t do better than this, then she would take her business elsewhere.

And so, she rarely went back to the same used car lot more than twice.

She ended up going to just about every used car lot in that town, and even some neighboring towns. She would *almost* get ready to buy, but just couldn’t make the commitment. Something held her back.

Sarah finally started making excuses to not car pool with Freda. And the stoplight stalling and re-starting became more and more frequent. And, sometimes, she worried that it would not start. One day, it did not, and she had to walk the last mile home.

Interestingly enough, she did not blame herself as she walked home. She did, however, curse the company that made her car, and said that she would never buy one of *that* brand again. She almost bought a car that weekend, but she managed to get her old one started, after it sat all night, and she backed out of signing the paper once more.

By this time, she noticed that not only did Sarah refuse to ride to work with her anymore, Sarah also did not answer her telephone when Freda called her ... almost never. She wondered what was wrong with Sarah. Maybe she and her husband were having marital problems and Sarah was embarrassed to talk.

Meanwhile, Freda's car did NOT suddenly begin to perform any better ... not at all, not at all.

Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses did it through the miraculous power of God, Who performed many miracles in order for their escape to occur. All God wanted was for them to trust God, and to let God transform their lives. They were unwilling. They would rather just complain. They would rather find fault somewhere, *anywhere*, else.

The apostle Paul said that Jesus' gameplan was the same as God's **gameplan**: namely, for God's beloved children **to trust God and to BE TRANSFORMED**.

Some people make that commitment. But, some people just shop around, looking for nice, hospitable folks that make them feel welcome to visit. But when it comes time to make the commitment ... to trust in God ... to actually *be transformed*, they just don't want to take that step.

Even, if the lifestyle they are following leaves them unsatisfied; even if the *ride* they have chosen is more and more often breaking down and leaving them stranded ... *being transformed* just seems beyond their ability to do. They are so used to what they have done in the past, they seemingly can't imagine making a change. They would rather complain, and *shop around*. Find fault with the others, and not make the commitment.

Sometimes, we have to go into the wilderness, in order to discover what we really need. Then we have to TRUST GOD. God loves us just the way we are ... gives us a new name in our Baptism: *beloved children of God, precious and beautiful to behold*. Nothing will ever change that.

But, God also loves us too much to leave us "as found." God wants us to be transformed.

Do you know someone who is unwilling to make that plunge. They are sometimes easy to identify. Their lives break down, and it's always somebody else's fault – sometimes, they even say it's God's fault.

God never gives up. God never quits trying.

But, neither does it ever end with God *just* loving us.

Transformation is part of the deal. And **that requires TRUSTING God, not just going through the motions.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.