

Exodus 19:2-8a ...if you will carefully listen to my voice and keep my covenant, then you will be my special treasure out of all the nations.

I don't care who you are, everybody loves to get a good deal. And most of the time, we like to talk about. Talk to any New England Patriot's fan, and they'll tell you how New England drafted Tom Brady in the sixth round of the 2000 NFL draft. 198 players were drafted before him. And even though we'll all have to get used to him playing for Tampa Bay now, it was only after 19 years, 9 Superbowl appearances, and 6 Superbowl championships that his time in new England came to an end. Such a deal.

Sometimes, though, the deal is so embarrassing, that we don't like to talk about it. Clearly, someone took advantage, for example, in the purchase of a little, 23 square mile island on the Eastern seaboard called Manhattan. Depending on who is telling the story, it sold for anywhere from a handful of pretty beads to coinage worth today about \$1000. The taxable worth of that same land today is nearing 2 Trillion dollars, with a capital T. There are, of course, a number of takes on who actually took advantage of whom in this matter. Its all quite interesting for another time, but we can all agree – that's an embarrassingly good deal.

And then there are the deals that are head scratchers at the time, objects of mockery even, that end up being extraordinary deals in the long run. For example, when the American Basketball Association and the National Basketball Association merged in 1976, 2 of the ABA teams were allowed to join the NBA and 2 were left to fold. The Kentucky Colonels took \$3 million to cease operations. But the Spirit of St. Louis owners negotiated a percentage of media fees in perpetuity. With the advent of televisions rights, the money started rolling in. Forbes estimated in 2011 that the owners had already made \$237 million dollars. Such a deal.

Of course, I could go on: the purchase of Alaska from the Russian Empire for \$.02 an acre; the copy of the Declaration of Independence purchased at a flea market for \$4 and later sold for \$2.3 million, or Reese's Pieces getting into the blockbuster movie *E.T.* because M&M's said no.

But the truth is, no matter who you are, all of us like to get as much as we can for as little as possible. And if we get something of great value for a small price we call it a deal. Did I get a deal on my last car. Did you see the Cub ad this morning? Some great deals. And of course the stereotypical used car salesman, Have I got a deal for you. We love to get deals. We thrive on it. Some even live by it, refusing to buy anything that either isn't on sale or for which they don't have a coupon.

But the problem with most of the deals that you and I get, is that the dealer usually isn't losing much in the deal. In fact, most "deals" really aren't deals at all. Receiving 20% off of a particular top isn't much of a deal when you consider that the store is still making quite a profit on you. I mean, a month from now, the store will be selling that same sweater for as much as 35% off. And a few months after that, the same sweater may well be available from the clearance rack for as little as 75% off. And guess what: the retailer is still making a slight profit in total costs. Yeah, the first "deal" of 20% wasn't much of a deal after all, was it?

After God had miraculously brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, he lead them to Mt. Sinai. It was there that God had *such a deal* for his people. The difference was that it actually was a deal – a great deal – for the Israelites. God established a deal, a covenant with his people, a two-sided covenant. He said, Here's the deal: you do this and I'll do this: ***if you will carefully listen to my voice and keep my covenant, then you will be my special treasure out of all the nations.***

Israel had just been miraculously brought out of Egypt, released from slavery. They had witnessed signs and wonders. They could literally see the glory of the Lord

before them in the pillar of cloud every day and the pillar of fire every night.

But at Rephidim they complained because they didn't have enough water. They quarreled with Moses and grumbled against the Lord. In his mercy, God made water come from a rock to slake their thirst. Problem solved.

But then, while still at Rephidim, the Amalekites attacked. Israel had no standing army, much less a trained one. Yet, as long as Moses held up his staff, God blessed Israel with the advantage. In fact, as the battle raged on through the day and Moses' arms grew tired, they had to be held up. Yet at days end, God had given his people victory yet again. Such a deal, huh? ***If you...I will...***

Looking back, it doesn't really seem that difficult, does it? The Israelites were to obey God alone and act differently than the other pagan nations around them. The Israelites would be God's treasured possession, dedicated completely to their God and his holy will. Israel would serve as God's holy priests: priests who would witness to the glory of their Lord, priests who would serve as mediators between God and his people, priests who would protect and preserve all of the blessings from their heavenly father's hand. And God, who had already done so much for them by preserving them in Egypt and in the wilderness, would continue to be their God, protect them from their enemies, bless them in abundance, and raise up for them their promised Messiah.

But Israel failed to keep up their end of the deal. Continually they broke their agreement. Continually they didn't live according to God's will. Continually they sinned. And sadly, it's no different for us. We might be quick to enter into a deal with God as we desperately pray right before a particularly difficult situation, "Please God. Just keep me healthy right now and I'll take better care of myself. Please God. Please let me get away with this and I'll never do it again. Please God. Help me conquer this right now and I'll be better at it in the future. Please God." Such a deal, God, I have for you, huh?

But did you catch the subtle shift in the deal God made in the Old Testament and the deals we offer the Lord? In our Exodus text, *God* is the one making the offer. In our minds and hearts, *we're* the ones making the offer. And that makes all the difference. Because you see, in order to offer a deal, you have to be able to deliver on your side of it. God can certainly deliver, but you and I can't. I mean, I can offer to sell someone a used car at a great price, but will they take me up on it if I only actually own the car a few days a week? We can offer all the deals we want, but we can't perfectly deliver our side of the deal. The Israelites couldn't either. In fact, the wilderness was littered with the peoples' broken promises and abject failures. Again and again they sinned. Again and again we sin. We fail and we are helpless to do anything about it.

But that's why God promised Israel, and fulfilled for you and me, a different kind of deal, a new deal, a new covenant...of pure grace. Paul described it in our Second Reading this morning, ***God shows his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*** Did you notice, in God's new deal of grace there is no ***if you...I will***. There is only God has. There are no sacrifice requirements from us, no compulsory giving from us, no mandatory fasting from us in order to get abundant blessings from God in return. God freely and lovingly gives the blessings of forgiveness, perfection, power and eternal life through the gift of his own innocent death and glorious resurrection from the dead. As Paul explained it to the Ephesians, ***...to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.*** Its full. Its free. Its yours, God's deal of grace. Such a deal.

But just like any other deal you get, don't let it sit on the shelf, don't let it stay parked in the garage, don't keep it to yourself. Because quite frankly, that's the best part of God's great deal of grace, enjoying it, sharing it, living it. As Jesus encouraged his disciples, ***Freely you have received, freely give.*** Such a deal. Amen.