

Title: A Recipe for Salvation  
Date: 9/10/2023 (Proper 18, Year A)  
Location: St. Alban's Episcopal Church  
Service: 10am Holy Eucharist (Hybrid)  
Readings: [Exodus 12:1-14](#); [Psalm 149](#); [Romans 13:8-14](#); [Matthew 18:15-20](#)  
Video Link: <https://youtu.be/y1b3dBVlo2s?t=1479>

O God, help us to remember that salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers. Through our love for you and our neighbors, reorient us and guide us into right relationship with you and all of Creation; and grant that we may wake from sleep to lay aside the works of darkness and put on the Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

In The Episcopal Church, preachers don't have a habit of giving titles to their sermons. When we post my manuscripts on the St. Alban's website, I give them a title so that people who care to read them see something more descriptive than Proper 18, Year A.

This usually happens after I preach, right before I send it to Ryan. But every once in a while, a title will jump out at me. That's what happened this week as scripture and commentaries and news articles and conversations swirled together in my subconscious. So, I present to you...drum roll... "A Recipe for Salvation."

A Recipe for Salvation.

That's a bold claim to make, isn't it? To be clear, I didn't say that I had **THE** recipe for salvation, as if there is one and only one. All I said was that I had **A** recipe. The idea that there can even be a recipe for salvation didn't come from me, nor did the recipe itself.

The idea that there can be a recipe for salvation came from the book of Exodus. Just look the instructions that God gave Moses and Aaron.

Take one one-year-old lamb, no blemish  
Isolate it for four days  
Kill it at twilight  
Reserve blood and put it on doorposts and lintels  
Roast over fire and serve with unleavened bread and bitter herbs  
Consume with loins girded, sandals on feet, and staff in hand  
Eat quickly, and burn the leftovers  
Serves one large household or several small ones.  
Repeat once a year, in perpetuity.

This is the recipe that will save them from the tenth plague. This is the recipe that will protect their firstborns, both human beings and animals. This is the recipe that will set them free from bondage in Egypt.

When the people of Israel followed this recipe for the very first time, they didn't know what was going to happen. There's this tension of calm and chaos in the instructions. Pick a lamb and wait four days. Then roast it and eat it quickly and be ready to go at any

moment. It's as if God was saying, "Hurry up and wait." Given the previous nine plagues and the situation with the Egyptians, this feast probably didn't much feel like a festival.

When the people of Israel follow this recipe today, they do so to remember that God saved them all those years ago. This brings that past into the present. This reminds them that God is still with them and is always creating for them safe passage from slavery toward freedom, toward salvation. This reminds them to make time and space for a festival and to celebrate, regardless of what's happening in and around them.

By choosing to follow this recipe, the people of Israel show by their actions that they have been set apart by God for the purposes of God. Those who don't see themselves as belonging to God will go about their days and live their normal lives, whereas the people of God will stop whatever they are doing to celebrate this festival. They will intentionally make the time and space to reorient themselves toward God.

The Hebrew Bible organizes the books of what we call the Old Testament in a slightly different order. The three sections are called "the Law," "the Prophets," and "the Writings." The Law refers to the first five books, from Genesis to Deuteronomy. These books include laws that govern their daily lives, their rituals of worship, and their relationship with God. These books also include the stories behind some of these laws.

So, another way to look at these books of the law is as books of recipes interspersed with personal stories. It's tempting to jump straight to the recipes, but knowing the stories, the arcs of these different narratives, can help guide how we read **and** how we follow these ancient recipes.

Speaking of recipes, how many of you consider yourself more of a cook?  
How many of you consider yourself more of a baker?  
How many of you have no interest in either?

I understand that baking falls under the general category of cooking, **and** I've often heard it said that the difference between cooking and baking is that baking requires more precision when it comes to following recipes, while cooking is more forgiving. What say you? In my experience, I would say that's true and not true.

While I enjoy baking, I'm not always the most precise baker. The butter isn't always at room temperature. I try to use less sugar than the recipe calls for. And I was in my 20s before I learned that dry measuring cups and wet measuring cups are NOT interchangeable. For the most part, things still turn out well.

Moreover, there is not just one recipe for chocolate chip cookies; there is more than one road to that destination. Consider all the variations;<sup>1</sup> thin and crispy or thick and chewy, dark chocolate chips or milk chocolate chips, vegan or gluten-free, and so on.

As for cooking, there was a cookbook and TV series a couple of years ago called "Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat." Early in the first episode, author and host Samin Nosrat tells viewers that these four basic elements can make or break a dish and that if they commit to

mastering them, they can become not only a good cook, but a great one.<sup>2</sup> So, while cooking doesn't require as much precision as baking, understanding these basic principles can help us improvise more confidently in the kitchen.

I share all this because when it comes to the law, some laws look more like baking recipes, and some laws look more like cooking recipes. Some of us want to be precise like bakers, and some of us want to follow the Spirit like cooks.

The instructions given by Paul in today's passage to the Romans look more like a cooking recipe. "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8). Everything else flows from that basic principle. Instead of salt, fat, acid, heat, the recipe for salvation is built on faith, hope, love, and grace.

It is beautiful that Paul follows that up with, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10). The challenging part is when we start asking, what does it mean for us to do no wrong to the people in Austin who are unhoused? to the asylum seekers arriving in New York City? To the bishops in The Episcopal Church who are being investigated for sexual harassment,<sup>3</sup> domestic abuse,<sup>4</sup> or a pattern and practice of discriminating against LGBTQ+ clergy and those who opposed his stated views against same-sex marriage **and** to those filing complaints against them?<sup>5</sup>

The answers are both simple AND complex, because humans and human-made institutions and policies are complex. It will be our commitment to love and to salvation for ALL that compels us to ask these hard questions and to **keep** asking them.

On the other hand, the instructions given by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew look more like a baking recipe. It's a detailed recipe for escalating a grievance when one person does not understand or refuses to acknowledge that they have done wrong to another person.

It makes sense to face conflict directly instead of allowing it to fester, to give the other person a chance to explain their intentions and to tell them the way their words or actions were experienced. Sometimes, not saying anything or giving that person the benefit of the doubt is seen as the loving thing to do, but sometimes that perpetuates wrongdoing, unintentional or not.

If the other person refuses to listen, then it makes sense to invite wise witnesses to provide perspective and advice. Perhaps they can keep us from talking past each other. If the other person still refuses to listen after that, it makes sense to tell it to the church, both so others can avoid inflicting the same kind of hurt and to protect other people from being hurt by this person.

Ideally, this keeps us from gossiping about that person or triangulating and recruiting people to take sides. This keeps us from masking pointed comments behind "Bless their heart's..." This is a recipe for staying in relationship, staying vulnerable and open to one

another instead of putting up walls. Jesus said, “If the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” It sounds ominous, but remember, Jesus still ate with and walked alongside Gentiles and tax collectors.

At the same time, this can easily become a recipe for silencing people who are vulnerable, for groups and individuals to manipulate and gaslight women who have experienced abuse, to pressure soldiers who experience moral crises to fall in line, to insist to trans youth that they are too young to know or just confused. Some people who engage in these acts believe that they are taking these steps out of love, that they are protecting others from what *they* perceive as “sin.” They see themselves as fulfilling the law and ensuring that their loved ones will attain salvation.

So, how do we know we’re doing the right thing, or at least going in the right direction?

We remember that being Christian isn’t about being nice AND that binaries and boxes will not lead us all to salvation. It’s about crossing boundaries of our own making as we strive to be in right relationship with God, our neighbors and all of God’s Creation.

We remember that being Christian isn’t about being perfect. It’s about turning back to God again and again, correcting our aim when we’ve missed the mark, and re-orienting ourselves to God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Word of God.

There are many ways to follow a recipe, and we often adjust recipes when the context changes. Recipes are built to be responsive to new ingredients and new kitchen gadgets, changing dietary needs and changing climates.

At the end of the day, whether bread looks like naan or sourdough, injera or pan, pita or tortilla, it is the fruit of the earth and work of human hands, and it will nourish us.

At the end of the day, we don’t really know what the final product will taste like until we make the dish. So, we test out the recipe, we actively engage with it. The recipe to salvation doesn’t involve using our hearts and minds; it requires our hands and feet, our words and deeds. The recipe to salvation is one that brings us closer to God, that guides us to love God in a way that will inspire **others** to grow closer to God, that will inspire **us** to grow closer to God and all the people of God and all of God’s creation.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://southernshelle.com/the-great-chocolate-chip-cookie-challenge/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.foodandwine.com/news/samin-nosrat-cooking-tips-salt-fat-acid-heat-netflix>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2023/09/05/retired-oklahoma-bishop-identified-as-focus-of-presiding-officers-complaint-amid-calls-for-bishop-accountability/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2023/09/08/bishop-prince-singh-resigns-the-day-after-his-ministry-was-restricted-amid-title-iv-probe/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2023/08/18/as-florida-bishop-faces-potential-title-iv-inquiry-some-clergy-and-lay-leaders-feel-forgotten-and-alone/>