


“Passover Lamb”

Sunday, September 10th, 2017

14th Sunday after Pentecost

#2 in Series: EXODUS: Gods calls, provides, and fulfills

 **Exodus 12:1-14 (NRSV)**

This week, we encounter a passage about freedom from slavery, new beginnings, and leaving behind. It's about life and death. It teaches us how to get ready to move fast.

In this story, God institutes the Passover Feast and establishes a sense of time for the Israelites.

The final plague is about to be wrought upon Egypt and it is the most terrible of all.

Through bloodshed and grief, God will finally secure freedom for the Israelite slaves and send them on to the next phase of their journey of faith.

[Read from NRSV Bible]

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks, be to God.

[2ND Service: Affirmation of Faith]

[MESSAGE]

Passover commemorates the principal act of salvation by the Lord in the Old Testament.

It remains the high point of the religious year in Judaism.

It is a liturgical ritual that centers on telling a story that lies at the heart of their faith and recreating a ritual that reminds each generation of how God has always provided for them.

Narrative and ritual interpret one another; you cannot understand one without the other.

Let us pray... Lord, help us meet the challenge of leaving behind those things that enslave us. Show us a future with you that is so much better than any past we may cling to. In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.

This morning, I want you to look at your wrist or your smart phone or the clock on the wall; look at these screens that consume so much of our time.

How much of our lives, individually and collectively, are populated by clocks and calendars?

When asked, “*What do you do in your free time?*”, do you bemoan that you know of no such time?

What calendar are we using?

What is its origin and orientation?

Enslaved in Egypt, God’s people marked time with brick quotas, beaten backs, bitter lives, and murdered children.

God saw their suffering and heard the cries of his people.

God defeated the gods of Egypt and redeemed the Israelites.

In the desert, however, God’s people wanted so badly to get back to the things they knew.

It didn’t matter that it was an awful, deadly thing that stole their freedom and future.

They wanted so badly to get back to the Nile, to the meat and savory vegetables (Exodus 16:3), to

the predictable powerlessness, that God had to send them through a wilderness maze to ensure that they could never find their way back to slavery in Egypt (Exodus 13:18).

The people had to let go of their past in order to grasp God's future for them.

They had to give up the familiar, though brutal lifestyle they endured to go into the wilderness of the unknown.

They needed to stop measuring time in segments of suffering to realize that God's time is so much better than slavery.

It's interesting that the story of the first Passover does not begin with a narration of the actual event.

Instead, there is a description of the liturgy intended to remember the event later.

This device slows the action of the story and prioritizes the re-enactment over the historical presentation.

This is not just history as testimony about the past.

This is a narrative about the past that invites the hearers into the events so they can be experienced anew by the present generation.

The hope is that each generation will embody the spirit of The Exodus for a new world.

The purpose of the story is not merely to inform; it is to convert and shape the contemporary community.

It's why, even for Christians, Passover is so important.

This story invites today's expression of God's people to see itself in continuity with the original generation of The Exodus.

It reminds us about our community's foundation and the reasons for our existence; it talks about unity within the congregation as the command includes the smallest houses gathering with other small houses for the feast.

It asks us to serve as God's people in this present age and continue to re-tell God's story.

Most importantly, it challenges us to let go of the past, where we may be comfortable, and live-in to the future God has in mind for each one of us; we join together in the hard work of endings and beginnings.

It can be hard to let go of the things, places, relationships, and systems that enslave us.

I wonder what things we are hanging onto that keep us from moving forward.

Are there things from the past that hold us with their familiarity and comfort?

Moving ahead often requires letting go of something comfortable to embrace something challenging and uncomfortable.

God provided the Israelites with a powerful ritual to remind them of the need to always move forward and to be agile in the process.

What might our Passover ritual be?

The obvious parallel is Holy Communion; a story that also begins with the liturgy, not the event.

“On the night that Jesus was betrayed, he took bread and wine, blessed them and gave them to his disciples. He told them to consume these elements and then repeat the ritual whenever they gathered as a remembrance of what he had done for them.”

And yet, on that evening, the disciples could not know the full meaning of what Jesus was about to do; just like the Israelites had no idea what the final plague would bring to Egypt.

In both stories, the event involved the blood sacrifice of a spotless lamb as a sign of the peoples’ redemption from slavery.

Liturgy and ritual are essential parts of worship.

They involve the ritualized proclamation and passing on of the past core stories and traditions to a new set of eyes, ears, and mouths.

These could be children or the stranger in our midst who has yet to understand.

Sometimes I think that our contemporary church has abandoned much of the ritual of our past in an effort to become more relevant in the present.

But, more and more we hear of people who find it difficult to understand who Jesus is and why he came to earth and why we believe.

Going back to the exodus story reminds me that the traditions of God's relationship with humanity help us understand what we believe; why shouldn't we use those same stories to help others understand?

As I was reading the exodus story this week, it became so clear how important Holy Communion is for us as a ritual and as a narrative.

Jesus provided guidance and instruction to "do" this ritual "in remembrance of me."

All of the Gospels place a story immediately after the account of Jesus instructing his followers in ritual practice which is intended for ongoing future observance.

This narrative is the defining Christian story of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Just as the Passover story defined the core meanings of the ritual meal of Passover, so the story of Jesus' death and resurrection defines the core meanings of the Lord's Supper.

Ritual and narrative work together to interpret each other.

As Passover marked freedom from slavery for the Israelites, the Lord's Supper marks our freedom from the slavery of sin.

It means our liberation from this world and all that holds us back from full relationship with God.

It is open to all whom the Lord has invited; the invitation only requires an R.S.V.P.

The blood of the Passover Lamb, Jesus means that God will pass over the sins of those who partake.

In the Old Testament Passover story, the narrator said:

“When your children ask you what you mean by

this observance, just tell them that we are remembering the night when Yahweh passed over all the Israelite houses. That's when we became God's liberated people."

At Holy Communion, we tell each other, especially our children, just why we celebrate this little banquet so often.

It is not about the blood on our door posts, but the bread and the wine, the body and blood of Jesus that says, "*You are free!*"

It's so real you can taste it!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**