



The Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Sunday, September 6th, 2020

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Sermon Transcript

On Passover and Jesus

Two weeks ago, we left the book of Genesis and the story of Joseph, the owner of the multicoloured coat and the saviour of the Hebrews during a time of famine, and we moved on to the book of Exodus and the story of Moses, another OT hero who ultimately saved the Jews from slavery and oppression: Moses in the bullrushes, Moses growing up in the palace of the Pharaoh, and last week, the wonderful story of Moses standing on holy ground while God spoke to him from a fire blazing out of a bush. Yahweh has chosen Moses to confront Pharaoh and to bring the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt.

The Pharaoh however stubbornly refused the demands of Moses to "let my people go." So God unleashed a series of plagues on the Egyptians which did not move the Pharaoh. The tenth and climactic plague, the slaughter of the firstborn, will finally force Pharaoh's hand. At midnight the tenth plague struck, involving all the firstborn - Egyptian firstborn representing all classes, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on the throne to the firstborn of the female slave, not to mention the firstborn of all the livestock. The Pharaoh went into crisis mode and told Moses to leave at once and then he adds (in the next chapter) an unusual parting request: Go, worship Yahweh, and bring a blessing on me too.

The narrator does not pause to give all the gory details of the plague but remembers instead one central purpose of all subsequent Israelite worship -- to get a blessing for Pharaoh, heretofore their biggest enemy. So Israel is to pray for its enemies, just as Jesus would later say, "Love your enemies, and do good to those who persecute you".

The Lord said to Moses in the land of Egypt, "This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you (Exodus 12:1-2...)...This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. (Exodus 12:14).

Pesach (Passover) may well be the most central feast on the Jewish calendar. It celebrates the exodus from Egypt not just as something that happened in the history of Israel, but as a reality of life. In the Haggadah (the Passover liturgy), it is said that everyone should celebrate Pesach as if he, or she, at this moment is leaving Egypt. That is a core Jewish understanding. By remembering the exodus, you participate in it, experiencing yourself the liberation from Egyptian slavery.

The exodus happened over 3000 years ago which makes Passover one of the oldest religious holidays continuously celebrated by human beings.

It seems that what God is saying is to the Hebrews is: We need a new beginning that must never be forgotten! We need our reality redefined by a single, decisive event that becomes the most important thing about us. Israel would celebrate forever the day God gave them the deliverance that they needed.

You may ask: what is this date for the Christian? The night before Jesus died, he celebrated the Passover with his friends. As he celebrated, he took some bread and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." He then took the cup, and said, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood". At this Passover meal, Jesus told us that he was offering us a new beginning.

Jesus' death for us is the beginning, the defining date for the rest of our lives. It's a memorial day for us. It's why Jesus told us to "Do this in remembrance of me" We need a new beginning. A fresh start, and nothing will ever be the same.

Passover is a reminder of what the Book of Exodus and our life in Christ is all about: freedom. Passover, of course, remains a central ritual in Judaism to this day. During the liturgy, the narrator says: 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 had blood on their doorposts. That's when we became God's liberated people.

And so at the eucharist, we tell each other, especially our children, just why we celebrate our little banquet so frequently. It is not blood on our doorposts, but the bread and the wine, the body and blood of Jesus that says "You are free!"

All the baptized are welcome here -- every age, every class, every gender, every race, sinners included. . As we feast at this table, we pray for those who have hurt us, who speak ill of us, or who even hate us. Just as the Israelites were asked to pray for its enemies, can our healing at this table lead us to pray that God would bring health to our enemies as well?

In the biblical tradition. The Passover ritually proclaims and passes on of the past core stories and traditions to a new set of eyes, ears and mouths, whether a new generation of children, or the alien or stranger in your midst. In traditional Jewish celebrations, the Passover meal features children asking questions of their parents about the meaning of the meal and its many foods, each with their own significance and relationship to the biblical story of the tenth plague and Israel's deliverance.

The ritualized meal and the words surrounding it witness to the living God in such a way that a new generation comes to "own" those central stories and traditions as their own, thereby coming to know God more truly and love God more deeply. In the rich context of a community of faith and all its practices, "their" story becomes "our" story. "Their" God becomes "our" God. Who are we? Share a meal together and tell a story!

One of the things I have often heard from people is that they can be overwhelmed and confused about how the Old Testament and New Testament tie together. When you jump in and read a passage in the Bible without any context or overview of biblical history, particularly from the Old Testament, the stories can be confusing.

This deliverance from Egypt is what turns a bunch of dispirited slaves into a people, God's own people, intended to serve as a light to all nations.

Some three thousand years later, the Exodus experience and the Passover celebration remain at the heart of what it means to be Jewish. The Jewish people recognize that their God acts in history, liberates his people from bondage, leads them into freedom. The Exodus is the outstanding salvation event that God brings about in the Old Testament.

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus comprise the outstanding salvation event that God accomplishes in the New Testament, where we repeatedly see the great realities of the Old Testament reborn in startling, unexpected ways.

The Passover provisions in the Book of Exodus require the slaughter of an unblemished lamb. In the New Testament, the lamb that goes to slaughter is Jesus. Jesus knows about the death that awaits him; he could escape from it, but chooses instead to be the suffering servant, the lamb that is slaughtered. The Exodus is a tremendous liberating action on the part of God. With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, the Lord leads his people forth from Pharaoh's bondage into the land of promise. But the second Exodus, the one led by Jesus, is an event still more wonderful.

This new Exodus is not intended for one people only, but for all people who dwell on the face of the earth. People of every race and nation find places in the Exodus he leads. God delivers us not from Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt, but from the corrupting and destructive powers of this world, from that which draw us away from God's love. On this new Exodus Jesus leads us to the kingdom of God which we experience in part in this life, and where we find our home in the age still to come.

Moses delivers to Israel the commandments of God which he receives when he goes up to the top of the mountain. Jesus takes a bold step further. He delivers a new commandment: Love one another, as I have loved you. Love one another following my example.

Moses delivers to Israel the means by which they are to keep the Passover. Jesus establishes a new liberation meal through what he says over bread and wine. Moses speaks about the Passover lamb connected with exodus from Egypt. Jesus

is the Passover lamb for the new and universal exodus out of death into life. Moses points us to a feast. Jesus is the banquet and the host.

The legacy that Jesus leaves us. A new freedom meal. A new commandment of radical love. A new relationship between God and the world. A story to tell. Sometimes in the light of the chaos and turmoil in the world today, it seems as though we have lost our way. I think hearing these stories helps us to remember where God has been throughout history as turbulent as it has been and how God remains with us today as we continue our journey towards freedom.