

Table Talk
Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost
September 7, 2014
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I can't remember when it first dawned on me or was explained to me that the sacrament of communion, which Jesus instituted in the last supper, is itself rooted in the Exodus/Passover story: our communion comes from the celebration of the Passover meal. I was a brought-up-in-church child so communion was always part of my experience – I remember it first as a very tense time as the juice trays were passed with a lot of grownups nervous about spilling, and remember it first too as something I was not allowed to have. But at some point that connection of communion/last supper to Passover/Exodus became clear, and ever since it has percolated in me that there is a wealth of meaning to explore in those connections. And I wonder for you – not as a theological test – but just wonder for how many of you when you heard read just now part of the Passover/Exodus story, did you think of the connection to communion? How many of you when you receive communion have in your heart and mind the echoes of Passover/Exodus? I'm not sure – like I said, it's not a test – but it's just part of my ministerial mission in life that the stronger we can weave the 2 together in us, the more there will be for us to receive from both.

Alright, so let's listen to that Exodus passage - and this I think is an interesting thing to notice: what we see happen is that the whole ceremony for remembering the Passover, a whole liturgy you really could call it, is given BEFORE the event itself actually happens – right? Moses and Aaron might simply be hoping this Exodus plan works, but the LORD is already instituting a whole calendar and preparation instructions and wardrobe directions – a lot of detail! - 'lamb roasted, not boiled, cook it well done'. And this is all anticipating the liberation that the LORD is going to accomplish. It is a remembrance that looks ahead – a liturgy that anticipates liberation.

So, noticing that in this Exodus/Passover story made me realize for the first time – hmh- as Jesus celebrates Passover with his disciples, he institutes the last supper BEFORE his death and resurrection; 'do this in remembrance of me' comes prior to those pivotal events of salvation – the last supper establishes communion as something that anticipates the liberation God is going to accomplish; it prepares Jesus' disciples to receive the victory of life that is ahead.

That's interesting - it really would make perfect sense, better sense, for the Passover ceremony instructions to come AFTER the Exodus: the LORD said 'what has happened is very important – so now here's how to remember it'. It would have made perfect, better, sense for Jesus

AFTER his death and resurrection to say: 'you need to remember this – so here's how'. But the remembrance, the observance comes before – anticipating the salvation that is to come.

So what if someone asked you: 'why do you have worship at Hope Church EVERY week?...haven't you worshipped enough?' 'and when you do worship, why do you keep celebrating communion, over and over?...haven't you had communion enough?' It's a valid question – and there are all sorts of good answers you could give about God instructing us to worship and the need in the life of faith to gather together and be nurtured. But a different way of answering that occurred to me in percolating how these Passover – Exodus - communion – last supper observances come to us. I would answer that we are a people in need of preparing – you could say we are individuals and a community in constant need of a dress rehearsal – and what we're getting ready for, anticipating is the salvation God is going to provide for us. Just as Moses does with the Israelites, just as Jesus did with his disciples, we are practicing receiving the way of liberation from God that is ahead of us.

That can have some profound implications for us – faith, worship, that remembers forward, you could say. I know there is plenty of meaning in worship that looks back to give thanks, that examines our lives and offers regret, that prays for burdens we carry – that is all there and good. But I also know there is not one thing in the past that we can change; while God does give us the power to change our future, by practicing to meet God there – the God of salvation and liberation. When I think of our worship, our liturgy, our celebration of this sacrament, it is all a kind of practicing, rehearsing the story of who God is, who we are, what we are called to be as followers of Jesus Christ. And as any dedicated musician, or athlete, or actor will tell you, the reason you rehearse is so that when the real thing happens it comes naturally to perform your part.

People of God – in this worship today, in this liturgy of prayer and praise, of listening and speaking, of communion and blessing – we practice being people who God will deliver from all that enslaves us, being those whom God frees to live in wholeness, being those who are claimed by the life, death and resurrection of the one who nourishes us with true life. And having rehearsed that together, we are prepared to be brought by God into that reality in new ways - to live as such people in deeper ways.

- in a world of oppression – conflict: we become ready to witness that God is present to liberate; and we are prepared too to receive God's judgment when we are the oppressors; we are prepared to witness that God's way is to bring all into liberation

- think of the Gospel lesson, speaking of dealing with offenses done to you. Here you are prepared for God to take you on the way not of retaliation but of reconciliation (and we're even prepared to

keep reading in Matthew 18 as Jesus places no limits on forgiveness) – I might even be prepared to recognize that I offend others too, and to journey into reconciliation there also.

- think of the Romans passage: as we face destructive choices and false desires within us and around us, here we rehearse the truth that God's way of love and light is the substance of true life, and we journey into the paths of integrity and wholeness that God provides for us.

- look at our lives: as we carry all that is broken in us, here we are prepared to go forward not as those who are alone but as those who abide in the healing presence and grace of God

As we come today to the table, to the Passover meal, to the sacrament of life, what we will talk about – remember, rehearse, anticipate - is the salvation and liberation from God that is ahead of us; the path of life God provides before us. We share this meal preparing to follow God into that future of freedom and life.

Next week – at 8:30 & 11am we have scheduled another dress rehearsal – I'll be there because I need the practice. AMEN.