



## **Pentecost 12**

**September 4, 2011: Christ Church, Hope**

### **Exodus 12:1-14**

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

---

From monastic and writer Martin Smith: "Spirituality is a complex of practices and values concerned with the divine urge for our freedom. Spirituality is about setting about being set free... Spirituality is not a realm of concepts and ideals but is embedded in praxis, actual ways of practicing freedom. We need lots of practice to be set free."

One of my more memorable moments with a spiritual director of some years ago came after an hour of my struggling aloud yet again with a situation that had been dogging me for over a year. A patient listener and supportive director, she had nodded and patiently listened to my angst until I had no more to say. After a time of silence, she said to me: “Melissa, pretend for a moment that you are completely free to live in the full dignity of your identity as a child of God while honoring others as children of God. Now what do you see?”

I think of this moment when I hear our reading from the Book of Exodus for today, for that reading is all about what it takes for the Jewish people to be set free. The story is once again a familiar one, The Jewish people are on the cusp of their liberation from Egypt and God tells them what they must do to protect and prepare themselves for their exodus. Each family or group of families must find a lamb, spotless and without blemish, and on the eve of their departure, must kill it and roast it and eat it. In addition to this, all are to sprinkle their thresholds with the blood of these lambs which will then serve as a sign to God to pass over and spare the Jewish households as God moves through the land killing the Egyptian firstborns. This drastic step on God’s part was meant to be the final action that will convince Pharaoh to let the Jewish people go.

But the shedding of the blood of lambs is not all the shedding the Jewish people will be invited to do just prior to their liberation. We hear that they will need to shed other things too: “This is how you shall eat (the lamb)”, says God, “with: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly.” Shed everything but what you will need to wear for the journey, God says, and, oh, by the way, shed the pace at which you would normally do things. For freedom requires traveling light and moving quickly.

I find this a fascinating way to begin the year here on the Sunday after Labour Day. Here we are, many of us, getting ready to take up or in the process of taking up our normal fall activities—whether that’s our jobs, our schools, our search for a job, or our preparation for the next phase of our lives. Here we are, getting ready to take up whatever that might be, getting ready to hunker down and do it, while the people of God, our spiritual forebears, are getting ready to leave their lives behind.

They are, in a sense, about to enact what Martin Smith talks about in his definition of spirituality—they are about to get some practice in living out the divine urge for their freedom—setting about being set free.

And so I wonder—what might this story of freedom tell us about ourselves as we take up our lives this fall AND try to live more deeply into our own spirituality that always needs to go to school on the practice of freedom? And what might this tell us about the God who is our spirituality and is the source and focus of our spiritual practice?

So let’s start there—with that God. What is the “divine urge for our freedom” all about? Why is God so set on our liberation from bondage? We have to go back to Exodus 3, our reading from last Sunday, to be reminded of this. In Exodus 3, we hear that God wants his people to be free not because freedom is some kind of abstract good but because God has

seen and has heard the suffering of his people in bondage and because God has promised his people that one day they will live in their own land, a land full of good things.

Knowing this, and even at times clinging to this, helps me when I lose sight of the actual choices I have in my life as well as the goodness of making them. God has heard my suffering in bondage and is calling me to be free in order that I will live not in someone else's land but in my own land.

And, of course, there's more. For in this story we get to look at what it takes to get ready for liberation. It involves the shedding of many things, including blood. The way I think of this story is that all of the action---what happens to the lambs, what happens to the Egyptians and what actions the Jewish people take---all of the actions---are clues about what the cost of freedom may be for us in our lives. In this case, sacrifices may be needed, nourishment may need to be found, hopes for the future may need to be let go of, urgency may need to be adopted, and things may need to be left behind. And so, in a sense, besides giving us perspective on the divine urge for our freedom, this passage, tells us what to expect in our passing over to freedom. It will not come easy. It will not be cheap.

And it will not stay put. For what is the story of the newly freed Jewish people in the wilderness but the story of a people who in a nanosecond began to yearn for the land of their bondage, for the place where they had better food and a more predictable life? And so it is with us as we try to live a life free from bondage. We will experience a tug toward the way things used to be.

And so today, what is the freedom and dignity that God is calling you to? Where are you hearing God call you to throw off bondage and to prepare yourself for the costly journey towards a land that is your own? Where in the life of this parish is this same thing happening? Where is Christ Church being called by God to throw off the yoke and the burden of diminishment, of bondage and to live in a new land in which it stands fully dignified and ready to be an agent of God's own dignifying power in this community?

Like you, I already have far too many things on my calendar. And to be honest, I am strangely comforted by the burdens of all these commitments---as if they somehow justified the value of my life. As I think about what it will mean once again to begin creating the space needed to stay in touch with who I really am as a daughter of the most high, my mind is quickly overwhelmed with the fear of the sacrifices I might need to make, the nourishment I would need to sustain me, and the things I might need to leave behind if I really were to be the person that in my creation and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, that I have been given to be. Perhaps you too know what it's like to feel all these things.

And so you and I must listen, listen very carefully for the voice of our God, a voice that comes to us through Scripture and in the silence of our hearts---a voice that reveals that comfort can be a cover for slavery and that for those on the path of freedom, nourishment will always be provided. We must listen for the voice that relentlessly seeks after us, a voice calling us to be the dignifying love of God in the world. We must listen for the voice of the Most High. We must listen.