

Remembrance

Proper 18A~ September 10, 2023

Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 149; Romans 13: 8-14;

Matthew 18:15-20

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In the name of our God who is Life Abundant, Love Overflowing, and Spirit Outpouring, Amen.

As we recently experienced in our worship on August 6th, the Feast of the Transfiguration, today we are hearing a well-known story that is most familiar to us in a completely different liturgical context. Our reading from Exodus is proclaimed every Maundy Thursday because it tells the story of how the LORD pauses before the final and most deadly of the ten plagues of Egypt- the horrific loss of every firstborn in that land-to give Moses and Aaron detailed instructions for the institution of the Passover feast. This is the story of deliverance for God's chosen people from the death and destruction all around

them, a story so powerful that the Israelites are instructed to tell it again and again every year to a new generation, gathering in holy community for a festival centered on remembrance. The ancient story comes alive every time the meal is shared and God's promise of protection is heard, remembering how God has acted on behalf of their ancestors and continues to act in ways that bring liberation from bondage to the faithful: "This day shall be a day of remembrance for you," says the LORD. "You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance." *This establishes a foundation for holy community to be formed when we gather together to feast and to remember all the things God has done for God's people.*

The Exodus event is the centering narrative of the Hebrew scriptures- certainly one of the pivotal events

in all of scripture- and the Passover is at the heart of the Exodus experience. This story declares to all who hear it that God longs for God's people to know freedom from anything that oppresses them- not only geographical freedom, but the freedom to create a new community who will live in safety and abundance, one that will honor this initial deliverance and commemorate it as faithfully as their ancestors did.

This is a community who will struggle- as we all do, because we are human- to live by the teachings of the God who caused all things to be, trusting and proclaiming that this God who promised deliverance and protection will be present with all people in every age to come who turn their hearts towards God. In the words of last week's Gospel, this is the God who promised: **"I AM the One who was present to those who came before you and I have not forgotten my people- I will rescue them and bring them to a place**

of safety, of blessing, of wholeness. I AM WHO I AM- I AM the One who will do this.”

Faith communities are not built through any one particular experience of God’s love and protection, no matter how powerful and life-changing that experience might be. As you know, beloveds, we build them over time and with the intentional work of everyone included as we journey through the seasons of life together- hard ones and glorious ones- and tell the stories that make us who we are. We build them on the gratitude and joy that we hear in today’s psalm, formed as people gather together “to sing God’s praise in the congregation of the faithful.” We build them on the wisdom of the Apostle Paul that the commandments can be summed up in the words: “Love your neighbor as yourself...Love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” We build

them on the difficult but necessary work that Jesus describes in today's Gospel, where we hold challenging conversations with those who have caused us harm in some way, bringing other members of our community with us into these vulnerable spaces, remembering that "when two or three are gathered in my name God is present there among them." And we surely build holy community when we share a meal together, both the kind we enjoy around a dining room or picnic table, nurturing relationships as we nourish our bodies, and the kind we share when we gather in worship, telling and retelling an ancient story that holds deep and life changing meaning for us, and then partaking of food and drink because the one we call Lord has commanded us to do this.

The feast of the Passover, of course, remains a festival central to the worship of faithful Jewish people to this day- and it was during a Passover celebration- Jesus

and his disciples gathered to share the traditional meal- that Jesus instituted what we have come to call the Lord's Supper. And so it was against this backdrop of all that the Passover represents- the continually unfolding narrative of deliverance and gratitude to God for God's protection and blessing- that those who were present in that upper room first heard the words of Jesus that we now hear in every celebration of Holy Eucharist: **“As often as you eat this bread and drink this wine, do this in remembrance of me.”** This meal too will remind us of our own history of liberation and deliverance, offer healing from that which would wound us, return our hearts to God as we work to release all that has separated us from what we know to be holy and true, invite a journey towards new life and wholeness for all who partake. Everyone who is hungry is welcome here- everyone who longs to be a part of this new community will help to shape it as we gather over and over to be fed

and then go forth to “love and serve as faithful witnesses to Christ our Lord.”

I have said for years that if we could somehow get everyone we know, especially anyone who is longing to experience a deeper connection with the Holy and lean into love and hope and healing- if we could only share the Eucharist with them, encircled as it is by prayers and fellowship and the living Word and the invitation to take how we have been fed and changed out into our world, it would touch something in them so deeply that they would return again and again to the table to be fed and there they would be transformed. I myself have always felt this way- as I shared in our recent newspaper article, I was hungry to receive Communion years before I was allowed to have it when I was confirmed as a teenager. This was of course decades before any sense of call to the priesthood would make itself known to me- at least in a way I could not ignore, because I do believe this call was part of me since

the time of my creation- and long before those who love me and mentor me would invite me to claim my call as authentically as I could- *but I knew that something in my soul yearned for this moment.* Inviting you all to share in the sacraments together, especially when I celebrate the Eucharist and then invite you to be fed is, for me, the beating heart of my life as a priest. *I believe with all my being that everything we do is born in this moment when we are fed by all the fullness of Christ- that with God and with everyone gathered here and with the whole communion of saints who are always present even if just beyond the veil a community is formed- one that both lives out this abundant goodness in the world and yearns always to come back to receive it again.*

The acts of preparing for the feast, of eating and drinking, of invoking the presence of the Holy Spirit upon the gifts of bread and wine so that they might really “be to us the Body and Blood of Christ”, as we do at every

Eucharistic celebration, do not stand alone as the means of nourishing us, nor did the actual Passover meal for the Israelites. *They do so rooted in the command to remember God's promises, God's deliverance from all that holds us in death and darkness instead of life and light, God's invitation to continue to shape a new community where the retelling of God's providence is always at the heart of everything that we do.* As we will soon hear in the words of Eucharistic Prayer B: **“We give thanks to you, O God, for the goodness and love which you have made known to us in creation; in the calling of Israel to be your people; in your Word spoken through the prophets; and above all in the Word made flesh, Jesus, your Son. In him, you have delivered us from evil, and made us worthy to stand before you. In him, you have brought us out of error into truth-out of sin into righteousness-out of death, and into life.”**

Amen.

