

Church of the Pilgrimage
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Exodus 2:23-25; 3:7-15; 4:10-17

During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them. The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain." Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' "This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation. Moses said to the LORD, "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." The LORD said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." But Moses said, "Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else." Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses and he said, "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. But take this staff in your hand so you can perform the signs with it."

Communion Meditation

On the communion table there is a globe, a brick and a hymnal.

I do not have memories of participating in communion when I was a kid. It may have been way back then that my UCC church only observed the Lord's supper quarterly – four times a year would make it "more special" the theory went in many a protestant church at the time. It may have been back then that children were not permitted at the table. Maybe we were dismissed for Sunday school while the rest of the church celebrated communion. I don't really know.

I have a memory from being about 13 years old. It was not at my growing up church, but at a youth group meeting in Southern Ontario at my cousin's Baptist church, a pastor leading a worship service in a church basement space. There was grape juice and wine, and before inviting us to partake, the pastor emphasized our need to consider our sins. We could not presume to come to the table in an unexamined state. We were unworthy. There was a moment of silence for us to think about all we had done wrong, and about how badly we needed God's grace. What did I think of? I don't remember. And if I did, it might be better if I uh kept that to myself for today.

This emphasis on our sin and God's forgiveness, on how it was for our soul, was one way of understanding this meal. For me, for quite a while, it was the only way –this very personal and really rather individual way of understanding communion.

But here today we have a globe on our communion table. We are gathered on this world communion Sunday, remembering that as we share this meal, so do many around the world. Around the world, this Sunday, there are people who have already gathered in grand cathedrals and in simple grass roofed huts to sing, and pray, and remember Jesus in this way and as morning dawns in places west of here, there will be more churches joining in this one meal. Today I find myself thinking of people in Puerto Rico with homes and of course also churches devastated by hurricane winds. I think of people in Mexico, of people without food, water, electricity. I think of congregations in those places and their need to minister to desperate people, to offer hope in such extraordinary times. Are there tables in Puerto Rico and in Mexico today, perhaps not in damaged churches but in streets or courtyards, out in the open, calling people to hope?

What if communion, what if Jesus calling us to this table, was not just for our own spiritual wellbeing but for the wellbeing of the whole world? A vision of people at one, of unity and harmony, a vision held up each time we break the bread and drink the cup? "People will come from east and west, from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God." What if communion is also this great gathering in across differences of language, culture and race?

I think of the Opening Hymn we sang, I Come with Joy.

I come with Joy to meet my Lord, forgiven, loved and freed.
In love and wonder to recall his life laid down for me.
His life laid down for me.

(now that's very individual)

(Then the second verse)

I come with Christians far and near to find as all are fed
A new community of love in Christ's communion bread,
In Christ's communion bread.

(now the third)

As Christ breaks bread and bids us share,

Each proud division ends.

The love that made us makes us one

And strangers now are friends. And strangers now are friends.

What if communion is all these things?

Individual. Global. Communal.

There is one more aspect to lift up – and to get to that I lift up this brick, remembering that a long time ago, in Moses time, the people were slaves, spending their lives making bricks for Pharaoh's building projects. God saw this misery, this injustice, and called Moses to speak to Pharaoh to let the people go. God did not make human beings to oppress other human beings. And long before Jesus instituted this meal, there was another meal, the Passover meal, to remember the way God worked through Moses to set the people free.

In this meal, we are called, just as Moses was called -- called to know ourselves forgiven, loved and freed. Freed from the burden of sin, freed from thinking its all up to us to make our way, and freed from isolation, from living as if we were the only person, the only church, the only country.

I heard a story recently, and I'd like to offer it today. It's of a woman in Mexico, who had a prayer shawl wrapped around her as she told her story to another woman. She told her story weeping, for it had been scary and painful, the night when the earthquake happened. Her husband was not at home the night of the earthquake, and she managed to get their four year old daughter from the second floor down to the first floor as the house fell around them. Then she brought her 85 year old mother in law to the small part of the house still standing. The three of them huddled there in the dark, unable to find a way out of the house.

It was at that moment that they saw the first blip of light. Fireflies! Never before had this woman seen fireflies in her city home. They hugged each other, granddaughter, mother, and grandmother and exclaimed with delight at each new flash. When the neighbors finally called them and helped them out, they discovered that there were fireflies all over the neighborhood, bringing joy and hope sparkling in the darkest of nights.

We come today to this table as people looking for fireflies in the midst of so much bad news. We come knowing that sometimes we are called, not to do everything, but to do something to be a firefly bringing light. This may be another way too of looking at this meal – that it—this table, this meal -- is like a firefly, bringing hope of moving beyond this present distress.

May our hearts be lifted up. May we be in communion with God and with one another. And may all God's people be fed with hope today.

Amen.