

Rev. George Miller
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Exodus 13:1-8

This week was a milestone in the moving-in process.

While continuing to make my house more homey with a rug here and an appliance there, I unpacked my CD collection.

It felt like seeing old friends who have taken me through so much.

Beyonce who brings me joy. Janet Jackson who shaped my youth. Lalah Hathaway who brings great calm.

But there was a Carrie Underwood CD I totally forgot about, and some Usher CDs that quite frankly, I've grown out of.

It's probably time to take them to Vintage Vinyl to be sold.

But, I came across an old dishcloth that really should've been thrown away in the move.

I'm so glad I didn't. It's 8 years old, faded, with images of fish, and reminds me of good times and memories, people, and places.

How many of us have an item like that? Something so worn, torn and raggedy, but we see it, hold it, we feel good and smile?

But then we have items that used to mean something, but now they are just taking up space, so it's probably best to let it go.

This has indeed been a week of adding, holding, and releasing.

How did our ancestors do it? The ones who came to Ellis Island; those who came to Louisiana, traveling up the Mississippi?

How did they decide what to keep? What to let go? What to sell? What to give away?

What about our immigrants and refugees, or those who are currently serving our country?

What about when our youth go to Camp Moval or the Mission Trip and they have to decide what to pack; what they can do without?

It's not so easy to leave your hairdryer, razor, or favorite pair of PJs.

What about all of us at places like Friendship Village and Tower Groves who made the decision to downsize, sell their home, and move into a 1 or 2 bedroom apartment?

Now, there can be great joy in throwing and giving things away, especially when it is by choice, when you know it is time.

It creates space to breathe, relax, and welcome the next moment and blessing to come along.

But there is the sadness when we must leave things behind because either we have no choice or there is simply no other way.

This is just a small portion of what today's reading is about.

Here we are in Egypt, so far from the cool breeze of the Garden or starry skies of Sarah and Abraham.

Joseph and his family have been buried for at least 400 years.

A terrible thing has happened- the people were so prosperous, so plentiful that the Pharaoh felt threatened, so he enslaved them.

For centuries all the people knew was harsh treatment, hard work; breathing bitter lives of bricks and back breaking field work.

But God has heard their cries, God knows their pains, is aware of their suffering, so God acts.

How God acts is through the person of Moses, a most unlikely individual with a checkered history, a great fear of public speaking, and some insecurity.

But you know- when God has a plan, and God calls who God calls, *anyone* can accomplish great things.

So God empowers Moses to engage with the Pharaoh, to seek release of the people.

There are signs and wonders, plagues and finally, Passover.

God is ready to set the people free; God is fixin' to pry them away from the Pharaoh and bring them into the Promised Land.

But first- there is instruction. Consecrate your first born. Remember this moment; remember this day.

Make sure to tell your children and your children's children what God is about to do.

And for yourselves, make unleavened bread; bread that has no yeast. That is what you will eat as you prepare to enter into the land of Milk and Honey.

We may wonder- why no yeast? Why can't the bread be big and airy like the artisan loaves seen at the Kirkwood Farmer's Market?

Because, back then yeast was seen as symbolic. Yeast was used to represent decay, dysfunction, unnecessary weight.

As one theologian stated, when God tell the people to not have leaven bread in their possession, God is saying-

"Leave behind the bad residue. As you prepare to leave behind the past, prepare to leave behind the bad mojo."

This is God saying to the people "It is time to celebrate; it is time to experience a new way of life, so leave behind what you no longer need, leave behind what no longer benefits you."

"Leave whatever is going to hold you back, hold you down."

It is such a wonderful, timeless message.

There is a reason why this story has been remembered, retold and written down.

Because every one of us knows what it is like to move forward; every one of us knows what it is like to have to "*leave behind*."

Everyone here has had moments in which we were given the opportunity to let go and let God.

But of course, letting go is never as easy as it sounds.

Letting go is not like a switch in which one moment you have and the next you have not.

Letting go is rarely rarely easy.

CDs that bring us joy; dishtowels that have memories.

Letting go is rarely easy.

Behaviors we adopted to adapt to harsh situations. Ways of doing things that got us through tough times.

Ideas and world views that served their purpose, but are not the most visionary now.

We all, we ALL have things we hold on to that bring us joy and bring us more life.

Then there are things we hold onto that can keep us enslaved or bring us sorrow.

That is what God is talking about when God says "Leave the leaven behind."

God is speaking to people who have spent centuries being told what to do, how to do it, when to do it, and if done incorrectly, they would be punished.

God is speaking to people who have been oppressed for so long, that God does not want them to bring that pain into their next experience, into their new life.

God is saying “As you prepare to say goodbye to your past, leave behind that which can ruin your future.”

And the future God is talking about? It is so beautiful.

Don't you just love the mention of a “land flowing with milk and honey”?

We can only imagine that's how the ancestors felt as they traveled up the Mississippi and saw all the green grass, rolling hills and places to build sturdy homes and grow gardens and grapes.

To say the land is flowing with milk and honey is to say that the soil is rich; the soil is good;

the soil is full of nutrients needed to sow seeds, grow fruit, and bring forth abundant harvest.

A Land flowing with milk and honey is full of grass and flowers for goats to munch on and bees to pollinate and buzz about.

The people have been suffering. The people have been crying out. God has seen. God has heard.

God has a plan and God has a Promised Land.

To get there people there, 2 things have to happen.

First- a person has to come forward, answer the call, and be willing to lead the Team.

Second, the people have to be willing to leave behind the bad residue, the mojo,

the things that weigh them down and hold them back from celebration and new creation.

Will the people be able to do that? Will they be able to leave the leaven behind?

Will their feet touch the Promise placed before them?

Time will tell.

But for us, today, as their descendants, as their seeds, we get to remember, we get the chance to retell their story.

And we each get a choice, today and every today, to think about:

-what it is we would like to leave behind?

-what we would like to let go?

-and how we can each “Let God”?

For that, let us say “Amen.”