

20TH SUNDAY OF PENTECOST  
10.02.16  
EXODUS 12:1-13; 13:1-8; LUKE 22:14-20

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Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Creator, from our Savior Jesus Christ, and from the life-giving, in-dwelling Holy Spirit. AMEN

We are again reading one of those stories that can create nothing short of a crisis of faith. Many people throughout the centuries have been unable to find any redeeming qualities in this story. Many have joined Erin Taylor in wondering what we could learn from a culture - and a god - that so devalued girl children that they weren't even worthy of being killed along with the first-born boy children. Many who read this story wonder why anyone would worship such a violent, ego-centric, manipulative god. Many find it hard to accept that in order for the Exodus to happen, so many innocent children, women and men had to suffer and die. And I must confess that I join these many in rejecting the idea that in order to be ourselves or love ourselves or live "free", we must vilify and hate those who are "other".

So I am extremely grateful to Eden Weinzerl, this morning. For Eden, it was your interest in participating in this sermon that made me come up with an approach to this story that seems to do it justice and, hopefully, breathes new life into it.

Eden, could you come up here and join me?

*Maleficent* is Disney's retelling of *Sleeping Beauty*. I watched snippets of this widely panned 2014 movie during a rare few moments off this past week. Critics hated the extensive opening voice-over, but I found the first few lines rather inspiring. *Maleficent* opens with these words:

EDEN: "Let us tell an old story in a new way and we will see how well you know it."<sup>1</sup>

EMILY: That seems like a helpful approach to this old Passover story that feels so familiar that most of us probably have no idea what it really tells us about God and God's relationship with us.

EMILY: God said to Moses and Aaron: ... 3 Tell everybody that on the tenth of this month they should take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. 4 Any household that's too small for a whole lamb should get together with their neighbor and share a lamb; the lamb should be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it.  
Okay - sharing is good.

EDEN: Once upon a time, God saw a bunch of people who were pretty miserable: they'd been living in the shadows for a very long time. So, God said, "I'm gettin' you out and you're gonna want to remember the date - always. And when you remember this date, you should have some lamb. And if any family can't afford a lamb, a wealthier family in the neighborhood should

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<sup>1</sup> Introductory Voiceover from Disney's *Maleficent*, 2014; quote captured from: <http://www.moviequotesandmore.com/maleficent-quotes/>; accessed 10.01.16.

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invite them over and share their lamb with them. And everybody should get an equal part of the celebration lamb, with nobody left out or only getting the stringy pieces.” That’s what God said: we’re going to celebrate freedom, and freedom means taking care of each other, and being sure that everyone has enough.

EMILY: The instructions for how to prepare and eat the lamb are thorough: 5 Make sure your lamb is an unblemished year-old male; but don’t worry about if it’s a sheep or a goat. 6 On the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish year, slaughter it at twilight with everyone else. 7 Take some of the lamb’s blood and put it on the doorposts and the lintel of the houses where you eat it.

EDEN: One reason these people were trapped in their dim existence is they didn’t know who they were, so God said, “I’ll tell you who you are, you’re mine!” And God loved these people so much that God wanted them to stick together and help each other and show everyone else in the whole wide world how good it was to belong to God and each other.

So, first, God gave them a special sign, like the signs girls put on their tree house to keep the boys out - or vice versa - and this sign would mean that they belonged to God and that basically, they were already living in God’s big treehouse, so death couldn’t take them.

God thought the sign was really a good idea. So, because God loves everyone and wanted everyone to know that they belonged, God kept putting new signs on new people in different ways, always marking them to keep death away and to let everyone around see how good it is to belong to God and each other.

EMILY: 8 Be sure you eat the whole thing that same night; roast it over the fire and pair it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 9 Don’t eat it raw or boiled, but roasted. 10 Burn any leftovers.

EDEN: Now, these people had been living as slaves and they had learned that it was okay to make certain people do all the work while other people got all the benefits of that work. God didn’t like this. They needed to learn a new way of living. So God trained them in with a special meal: a wilderness meal, a journey meal: they could only eat what God said, they had to eat it dressed for the road, and they couldn’t keep any extras for a rainy day - because whether it was rainy or sunny they were supposed to rely on God.

It seemed like funny instructions, but it turns out God was training the people to trust God.

EMILY: Here’s how to eat the lamb: with your travel pants on, your road sandals on, and your walking stick in your hand; and eat it quickly! It’s the passover of your God.

EDEN: It was so dark, the people couldn’t even see all the different ways they were enslaved, but God was working to set them free. So they needed to be ready to go, ready to hop on the road, to this new place - and this new way of life - God had in mind.

EMILY: For, God says, 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 judgements: I am YAHWEH. 13 The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses

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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.

EDEN: Getting people out of their gloom is tricky. God tried all sorts of ideas, but the people kept sliding back into their murky depths: sometimes they slid on their own, and sometimes they were pulled under by others. Finally, God decided to try to teach the whole world a lesson: it is NOT okay to make other people live in the dark. God knew that humans would have a hard time learning this lesson, so God made a big, huge, awful deal out of this lesson, to make the message loud and clear for all the rest of eternity.

But we can be pretty dim, and not everybody noticed or cared, so humans kept shoving one another into pits of despair.

But just because humans didn't get the message doesn't mean God stopped caring or trying - God is still working on getting all sorts of people out of all sorts of murkiness.

EMILY: 3 Moses said to the people, 'Remember this day on which you came out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, because YAHWEH brought you out from there by strength of hand... 4 Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out.'

EDEN: "You are going OUT," God said. And God meant it. Bringing daylight into people's night is a big part of who God is and what God is about.

But once out of their nightmare, God's people did what a lot of us do:

afraid that they might be like their gloom-creators, or that they might learn from their adversaries, or, God forbid, that they might have things in common, the newly freed people told stories about their former "masters", turning them into evil characters.

Once they were free from gloom, they shoved someone else right down into it!

EMILY: When YAHWEH brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which God swore to your ancestors to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this observance in this month.

EDEN: God had made a promise to the ancestors of these people, a long, long time ago; and God keeps promises - no matter how old, no matter how impossible and often in ways we don't expect or anticipate.

But to keep this ancient promise, God had to kick a bunch of other people out of the land. This was AWKWARD to say the least!

It seems very wrong that God kicked everyone else out in order to give the Milk and Honey Land to the people escaping from darkness...

BUT, the people who had walked in darkness were finally in the light: they had been oppressed, abandoned people and now they had a home, a place to be themselves and to belong.

EMILY: Then God said, 'You shall tell your child on that day, "It is because of what God did for me when I came out of Egypt."'

EDEN: Which is why we keep telling the story: God delivers. God brings people out of slavery and death. God wants everyone on earth - and all of creation - to thrive. Telling this story - over

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and over again - is how we share this good news with everyone, with every generation: God delivers; God will see us through; God wants our lives to be full and good.

EMILY: But this is a hard story to share; it's hard, in this story, to see an end where the whole world thrives. This story is so accusatory; there is so much violence and dismissiveness of Others, and it's so filled with grief and despair - on the part of whole nations who lose out, who are painted as only "evil": how can this be a story of God's interest in blessing everyone?

EDEN: We can't read the Passover story from the Hebrew perspective, so we have Jesus. Jesus' story is our re-telling of the Exodus story. Jesus became the Passover Lamb, so God would pass over every household and every soul, ending fear and ending death. Jesus became the Passover Lamb so no one would have to live in slavery of any kind, any more. The price has been paid and there aren't supposed to be any more sacrifices.

We tell and retell this story to encourage each other to tell Jesus' story with how we live each day: if we believe Jesus' story is true, we trust God to provide for us, we strive to create communities where all people are free to be who they are created to be, free from guilt, free from shame, free from physical or mental or spiritual chains.

EMILY: Jesus' story is our retelling of the Passover story for the whole world: no one is the villain, no one loses, there is no more need for violence, and everyone is freed. That sounds pretty good. That sounds like a story to appreciate. That sounds like a story of God's grace. Thanks, Eden, for telling this old story in a new way.

AMEN