



“This will be a day of remembrance for you. Throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.”

That is the imperative which accompanies some odd and peculiar instructions around what will become known as the

Passover, that unique event in Jewish tradition which is the critical precedent for the event of the great Exodus. And the Passover and Exodus are important to Christians because they become the model for what is accomplished through the event of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. In both events, people are freed, by divine initiative, from what oppresses them: through a slaughtered lamb the Hebrews are set free from slavery in Egypt, and through Jesus, another slaughtered lamb, the world is set free from slavery to sin. But the process of getting there is all very messy.

“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.” Whatever is left over shall be burned before morning. This is no party with leftovers for the next week. There is no remaining evidence of the slaughtered lamb. Everything is consumed. With sandals on your feet and staff in your

hand, while eating some lamb, you are ready to do what was previously thought to be impossible: to flee, to run, to depart from your oppressor.

It is a divine intervention to the Hebrew’s slavery in Egypt. And here was their opportunity to be free.

The Hebrews all left in a great hurry. What allowed them to leave was the blood of the lamb on their doorposts which was a sign for the angel to “*passover*” their household while their oppressor was destroyed. For the oppressor, this is not a happy day; but for the oppressed, this was their emancipation day.

Centuries later, after Jesus’ baptism and 40 days in the wilderness Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth and attends worship at the synagogue. He is invited to read from the scriptures and he turns to the text in Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

This year of the Lord’s favour has a consistently clear judgement: which is always good news for the oppressed and destruction for the oppressor. So after reading this text Jesus is driven out of the synagogue, out of the town to the brow of the hill on which their town was built where the crowd is ready to hurl him off the edge of the cliff.

I'm just grateful that parishioners don't decide to do that to any readers of scripture or preachers at St. John's - hurl them off the edge of Elora gorge. I don't think we'd have many readers.

In the midst of the chaos, it is recorded that Jesus managed to *pass through* the midst of them and went on his way. But this is only the first day of his public ministry. Not a good way to start.

What I reflect on here is about power. For anyone in positions of power, if that power means that someone is oppressed, be very careful, because you will find yourself pulled down from that position of power, unless you use that power to free others. This is exactly what the incarnation demonstrates. God the Almighty and most powerful empties himself of all power and becomes subject to the powers of oppression. In Jesus God voluntarily becomes the slaughtered lamb and becomes all consumed on the cross in order that he might become the vehicle for the world to be freed.

The incarnation becomes an amplification of the Exodus on a larger scale.

Humble yourselves. Take the seat of least honour. Use your position of power to free others up. That seems to me to be the recurring message in the events of Christmas and Easter.

It seems to me that all of us have had the experience of being both the oppressor and the oppressed. We all

been in positions of power, and we have all had experiences of feeling powerless.

A wise mentor of mine says, any issue you face, any conflict in a family, workplace, or institution, is never about the presenting issue, whatever that is, it is always about power. Who has it; and who doesn't.

The gospel addresses both the powerful and the powerless, and the gospel reading today is addressing the imbalance of power in a community. If anyone in a position of power is oppressing you, name it. Take someone with you to name it. And if you are the source of that oppression, relinquish it. As you name the power, recognize that you are not immune from participating in this dynamic of power imbalances. For where ever two or three are gathered together, there is a struggle for power.

The remarkable thing liturgically is together we all acknowledge that "there is no health in us". Rather than point fingers at one another, we point one another to the One who was able to relinquish all power in order to destroy the oppressor, and raise us up to a new life of freedom and hope. Do this in remembrance of me.

As the apostle Paul says, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then, and do not be burdened again by the yoke of slavery."