



Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora
March 3 2024 - Third Sunday in Lent
Canon Paul Walker

To hear twenty children making their liturgical debut singing the traditional spiritual of “Shine On Me” is such a moving experience. You can’t help but be moved.

Presently the children are gathering with Kate Wright and one of our honorary clergy, Judy Steers, to hear the account of the eight sacred teachings. Whether it’s the ten best ways or the eight sacred teachings these are ancient signposts for living that help us to not self-destruct, self-implode or collide into one another. They help us stay in our lane and not cause an accident. But inevitably, as much as we try, accidents still happen and we all have the experience of losing our way.

The Hebrews had been freed from slavery in Egypt and were wandering in the desert looking for a place to call home. The desert was a dangerous place to be and not a place that you would willingly go. It was easy to get lost in the desert. But the Hebrews were given signs to follow. They were given the pillar of cloud by night and a pillar of cloud by day until they came to the place where it seemed to stop; on the mountain.

Whenever a mountain is mentioned in the Bible, something significant is going to happen. Noah’s ark

rested on a mountain. Moses went up the mountain to encounter God. The temple in Jerusalem is built on a mountain. Jesus gave a sermon on the mount in Galilee; he was transfigured on the top of a mountain; and he was crucified on (not quite a mountain), but a hill, just outside of Jerusalem.

So you know something important is going to happen. And what happens is Moses encounters God. It is such a powerful experience that when he came down out of the cloud they had to cover his face with a veil because it was too bright to look at. He was radiant.

For the Hebrew people there was, like for all people, a longing to make sense of the world, to give meaning to suffering, to ensure that they were not forgotten or without an anchor or frame of reference.

Some of them were convinced that God had abandoned them and they would be better off back in Egypt where they were slaves. So Moses went to God and asked, “What’s this all about? What do you want me to do with these people? They aren’t *my* people, they’re *your* people. This wasn’t *my* idea, this was *your* idea to go out into the desert. So what’s next?”

“Move forward.”

Whenever God wanted the people to move forward, of course they were, like any of us, filled with fear and anxiety for the unknown. So he gave them a sign. The sign here is the Ten Commandments.

In the time of Solomon the sign was the Temple.

In the time of King Herod the sign was a star in the east and the birth of Saviour in Bethlehem.

In almost every time there is always the experience to destroy the sign.

When Moses comes down the mountain and discovers that the people are worshiping a golden calf he throws the stone tablets down in anger and destroys the sign. A while later he goes back up the mountain to get another copy.

The Temple is ransacked and destroyed and the people are sent out in exile. Nehemiah rebuilt the temple.

In the time of King Herod when Jesus was born in Bethlehem he issued the decree for the horrific slaughter of the innocents.

Pilate, the governor, washed his hands of the decision to condemn Jesus to death, and put the decision on the people to have Jesus crucified.

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The sign cannot be destroyed.

“This will be a sign for you, you will find a babe wrapped in cloth and lying in a manger.” And the shepherds had the light shine on them: “The glory of the Lord shone around them... And they were terrified.” After they saw the baby in the manger they went with haste to tell others.

After the crucifixion the women were told, “This will be a sign for you, you will find the linen wrappings lying in the tomb.” And they went and found it just as it had been told them and they were terrified. But Mary Magdalene, when the light shine on her, had the courage to go running back to tell them, “I have seen the Lord”.

In Jerusalem just before Jesus’ arrest, he celebrated the Passover with his friends. It was sign that recalled the story of Exodus when angel of death passed over the households whose door lintils were sprinkled with the blood of a lamb and the Hebrews were set free.

“Do this in remembrance of me,” Jesus said.

This is what we do this morning. We remember this ancient sign of a covenant of freedom, a route to exodus, a story of liberation as Jesus becomes the Passover lamb, the anointed one, who could not be diminished by denial, betrayal, or insults; who could not be destroyed by condemnation or abuse; and who could not be contained by death.

You don’t have to believe it for it to be true. You don’t have to understand it for it to exist. You are invited to receive the sign and say to yourself, or to God, I want to follow this way. Because this is a sign that you are not abandoned.

You are always in the light.