

Sunday April 27, 2014 (Church of the Rock)

Title: The New Covenant Exodus

**Scripture**: Mark 1.1-13

Theme: Jesus is living out the Exodus story for all to see and in doing so imparts new meaning into two very old remembrances for the people of God. The passover bread and the parting of the sea.

**Introduction**:

One of the biggest concerns I have as a pastor is this: That we get so used to doing things and following traditions that we forget the sacredness of the symbols and the reasons why we have them. We then begin to do them just as a ritual and the sacred things which God calls us to as reminders of him become mundane. Approached with the thought of "Well we do this because we should". No, I really don't know why we just do." We live in a time and culture that does not have an understanding of the Biblical story. In fact some of you here today most likely do not have a full understanding of why we believe and do what we do. That's ok. However for those that do, over time we take for granted the things we grew up with and were taught. As a result we frame our world views through that lens and assume everyone has the same map we do. The danger for us is to forget the deep rich sacredness of God's commands to us.

After a while if we do not continue to understand and prayerfully visit our story, it becomes ritual. Something done because we are supposed to. We don't really remember why but we just do, and as a result it becomes empty of its rich deep symbolism. Jesus bookended his ministry here on Earth with two very special events. He started his ministry with a baptism which we have many folks doing today. The other was at the end of his ministry at the last meal he ever ate. I find no way in which to speak on one without speaking on the other.

From this we know that Jesus left us as his people with two reminders of what he did, who he was and how we are to remember. We call them sacraments or ordinances of the church. Depending on your faith tradition and how you were raised you will understand what these are. I am not going to talk about one faith tradition over and against another. In fact I'm not going to talk about that at all. Nor will I address frequency and how often we ought to celebrate Holy Communion and Baptism. I simply am going to look at what the Bible tells us that Jesus left for us to do. Two of the most important things, the ones which we celebrate here at Church of the Rock are:

**1-The Lord's Supper**. Also known as Holy communion or the Eucharist. We at Church of the Rock join together and take the bread and the cup as a reminder of what Jesus did. All who call Jesus Lord are welcome to participate. This echo's back into the story of the people of Israel. Jesus didn't just invent something new for his followers to do as

a means to remember him. He spoke new meaning into an old remembrance of deliverance that was the story of Israel. The Exodus story.

**2-Baptism.** We were commanded as followers of Jesus to go, bring the gospel to the world and baptize into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To baptize into Christ was not a new thing, but rather the fulfillment of an old promise. One which Jesus speaks of later on in chapter four of Luke's gospel. This too echoes back to the story of the people of Israel and their deliverance from slavery. Once again Jesus is speaking new meaning into an old remembrance.

So what do I mean by new meaning into an old remembrance?

I was probably four when it happened. I had these really cool imitation leather cowboy boots. Better known then as hard plastic. My brother and I shared a room in that particular apartment. Our bed spreads were that awesome late 60's, early 70's yellow. Then it happened, Dad came in. Nothing unusual, except forty two years later that old remembrance still stirs emotion. It was life altering, life defining and would impact me for years to come. Dad came in and said goodbye. What we didn't get then was that it wasn't just "I'm going to work", it was goodbye...He and my mother had decided to call it quits after a rocky 6 year marriage and life would never be the same. For the longest time that moment defined my life in many ways. Until I met my wife. I realized that even though my past was a train wreck in so many ways it did not need to define who I would be in the future. It was when I realized that I was able to begin working on things and allowing God to show me how he had prepared a better future for me, I was able to move forward. That will be an old remembrance for me all my life. But God spoke new meaning into a life that had very little almost thirty years ago. I don't share that for people to feel bad for me, but to help us understand some things.

Everyone of us have that defining moment in our life. I want you to think for a second. Good or bad, each of us had a moment which, if only for a short time, defined how we move forward. The people of Israel were no different. The Old remembrance of the people of Israel is the Exodus. That powerful story which we find Moses telling us about in the book by the same name. This was their defining moment as a people. It is found in Exodus 12 and following. It's the story which Jesus would live out before the people and just before the end impart a whole new meaning into their old remembrances in what I have titled today: The New Covenant Exodus.

It is hard to speak on baptism without understanding Communion. They both invoked old remembrances for the people of Israel. Powerful and deep meaning was found in the bread and wine as well as the water of cleansing. Jesus and his followers did not invent a new celebration for the Church. What Jesus did was bring to completion the story and longing of his people.

**Communion:**

The Passover meal that the people of Israel had been celebrating for almost 1400 years was the last meal Jesus had with his disciples. He took two of the most important elements on the table and spoke new meaning to them. We find an understanding of the old remembrance as we read Exodus 12. The Bible tells us:

*The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. 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. It is the passover of the Lord. For 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 judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses 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. This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance. Exodus 12.1-14 [NRSV]*

This was their deliverance meal. Each item on the table had a special significance to them. This is how we are to remember what God did for us, and that he will do it again. They were to be ready to leave right away making bread that would not need to rise but could be taken in haste. The lamb without blemish and its blood over the doorpost of the house signified that they were God's people under the protection of the lamb.

Judgement would not come to their house. Jesus said to his disciples at his last meal, I am THE lamb and the passover bread. My body has been prepared for you as the sacrifice. My blood, if you receive it will cover the doorpost of your heart. Whenever you take the bread and drink the cup we are remembering our deliverance: The New Covenant Exodus. Our bondage to the slavery of sin was broken when Jesus took God's judgement. We do this in the present to remind of of what he did then and that he promised he will return.

That is our communion. The sacred fulfilled promise of God to provide for our salvation and freedom is remembered each time we take the cup and the bread.

**Baptism:**

What we are celebrating today also resonated with the people of Israel in so many ways. Water has always been present in the story of Israel. Symbolizing cleansing, passing through to freedom and fulfilled promises and deliverance. Even before the Red Sea, Moses is set adrift on the Nile river only to be rescued by the Pharaoh's daughter. The Red Sea, that last and final miracle the hard hearted King of Egypt would see. The people of Israel passed through to their freedom. The Jordan river and Jericho where Joshua finally steps into the promise that God made to Moses some forty years before. It was there where they were told to take rocks from the center of the river and set up a pillar of remembrance. We find that text in Joshua chapters three and four. You see that passing through water to find freedom and the promises of God was nothing new to the people of Israel. So as weird as John the Baptizer may have seemed as a person [not many were running around anymore with camel hair clothes and eating bugs shouting at everyone to repent] what he was doing in the Jordan River was not.

It was no accident that Jesus started his ministry in water. John the Baptizer is in the Jordan river baptizing people who are repenting. Let's look at how Mark tells it:

*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.* Mark 1.9-13 [NRSV]

In these few verses Mark shares with us, he says a lot. Much we do not have time for today. But just so we hear the echo's of their old remembrances, I want us to notice a few things here as we see why being baptized is important.

**First:** This is before Jesus ministry has started and he does something that he didn't need to do. Matthew tells us that John didn't want to baptize Jesus, rather he wanted Jesus to baptize him. Yet Jesus told him it had to be done this way to fulfill all righteousness. What? What Jesus was doing was identifying with us and our journey, that need to pass through water to freedom and cleansing. In identifying with us he was also showing us how and what we are to do as his followers.

**Second:** He was identified as "The One". The spirit descended and God spoke: "You are my son, the Beloved." His action and obedience pleased God the Father. Once again setting the example for us.

**Third:** Probably most importantly, we see Jesus reliving that old remembrance out in front of his people. He identified with his people, his obedience brought God's anointing and now going out into the desert he was reliving the Exodus story of the nation of Israel. He was called, anointed and went into the wilderness or desert to be tempted for forty days. Echo's of the Exodus.

The people of Israel were called of God and baptized through the Red Sea and found their identity and mission in the forty years of wandering. Jesus was going to be the faithful Israelite and in a microcosmic way he was going to live out the exodus and call of the people of Israel and do it right. Fulfilling all righteousness and the Law.

Jumping to His last command given to his disciples before he ascended after his resurrection is found in Matthew's Gospel:

*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*  
Matthew 28.18-20 [NRSV]

Speaking new meaning into old remembrances. We baptize because we want to identify with King Jesus. It expresses outwardly and publicly what has already happened inside of us. The symbolism is profound and its meaning is deep. It speaks of how we have passed through the waters of baptism and identified with Jesus, better yet as St. Paul said, we died with him. Coming out of the water symbolizes that we also rise with him, out of the water of cleansing and into our freedom.

As we prepare, if I could have all those who are going to be baptized please get ready and I would like the worship team could come up. Also, please let Children's church know we are ready for them to join us.

I want to remind you that this is a time of great celebration. For us this is an "old remembrance". Jesus commanded us some 2000 years ago to remember what he did by partaking of communion and as his disciples to go out and baptize people. My challenge to you is to visit these stories within Holy Scripture. Ask God to speak to you in a fresh way so that our traditions don't turn into ritual, with all meaning and sacredness lost to time and hurriedness in life.

Worship team lead in a song.