

## Sermon Archive 478

Thursday 28 March, 2024

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Reading: Exodus 12: 1-14

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



### The Reflection's First Part: Memories of Egypt

Perhaps, O God, there's a special place for us to keep those memories that aren't quite our own, but sort of are - just that side of the early memories that we've made for ourselves, or half-received from those who held our hands while we were very young. The ones that are ours: a scene of sitting on a couch while sun shone through a window, the shape of the eaves at night at our grandmother's house, a peanut butter sandwich on a plate with its crusts cut off, venetian blinds in the bedroom - in our vague recall, **those** are **ours**, private to us of how we were back then. But just **that** side of these, there are other things we *call* "memories", but maybe are stories - the making of a garden, the speaking of a snake; the flooding of an earth, the hanging of a rainbow; the taking by the hand of an ancestor who's told to look at the skies and count the stars and imagine that all will be well in the promise of a god. What **are** these things, my God? Dare I call them "memories", like they belong to me, to us, like we'd been there? Or are they floaty things, half hung in the air (more like hopes, dreams, visions, legends or myths, gossamer promises)?

Whatever they are, O God, I hold them dear. I love the idea of Abraham and Sarah hearing a voice in their hearts (or maybe in their actual ears), and discerning that the doors closed to them might find other doors opened, if they can just set out on the road, believe in their hearts, trust with whatever it is that we trust with - maybe the "spirit", the "soul". "Come on, old couple" they hear, "and I'll take you to a table of milk and honey, a place where the future will open up and be exciting, maybe even fun - certainly holy and good and nurtured and free. Be my covenant people, old couple! Trust, follow, be blessed, see faithfulness face to face. Embrace this offer of covenant."

I wasn't there, O God, but I was raised to feel like this promise was mine - a memory for me, seeping into who I am, maybe who I'll be. I hold this,

goodness knows where - in that place just that side of what I remember and know, calling me maybe to be a pilgrim.

-ooOoo-

Right on the pilgrim's door, reality comes knocking - way on *this* side of what I know. It's called "Life in Egypt" and it's hard. The famous phrase will be "Now a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, 'Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them'. Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labour."

Forced labour's the *stuff* of slavery, and the *word* "slavery" seemed to fit. It's not easy to "hold your dreams" (or myths or stories) when your reality puts you in chains. Hosanna hands can't lift palm branches when wrists are in manacles. So anger flashes with fire, until falling into sadness. The spirit slows, heavy acceptance settles. Once anger's achieved nothing, what option but to settle in sadness?

And then into the sadness lately comes something strange. The land suffers what feels like a series of preternatural weird-nesses. You go to put things in the green bin and find yourself stepping on frogs. You lift your eyes to the skies and see clouds of locusts. There's blood in the water and lice jumping from the dogs. There's some ghastly erupting of boils on the skin - like everyone's pussy, infected (red, sore, cores of green) - darkness during the day. It's like creation itself is saying "something's wrong, the world is out of kilter - back! come back! before the first-borns die".

The politics, the hatred, the slavery, the manacles, the gradual fading of any sense that we are covenanted people (people who were promised good). Creation itself seems to join in with us in saying "something big must change".

-ooOoo-

The Lord, it is said, spoke to Moses. Prepare a meal for the people, Moses, a special meal. Let the meal be to them a meal of freedom, a refreshing for them of their being a covenanted people. Tell them to eat it with their sandals on, as if in the morning they'll be needing to go. Tell them to eat it with their walking staffs propped up by the front door. Eat everything up; if there's anything left, burn it - you want nothing left. It's like you're never going back to the pantry. Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow - yesterday's done, and covenant is calling.

What will it mean, O God? Where will we go? What does it mean for the Egyptians? Not that we care; they've been our living, breathing oppression, (save us from vengeance). And we wonder, will the memory of this meal become one of those things that we hold we know not quite where. Things that we didn't make, but somehow belong to us, just that side of what we remember . . . like hope, like vision, like dream. A legend, a myth, a gossamer promise? Like a rising in the faith that you are not done with us, but are restoring the love so long ago expressed? A *covenant* meal . . .

### **Music for Reflection**

#### **The Reflection's Second Part:** The new covenant in my blood

They wouldn't have known, God, what was to follow. As they burned the left-overs, cleaned the pantry, daubed their lintels with blood (who paints a house with blood?), what do you think they expected? We look back now with a whole lot of knowing, but an equal lot of amazement. Amazement at that one last plague that threw it all into complete disorder, breaking the chains, the mothers of Egypt screaming, the pushing back of the seas to open the road to freedom. Who'd have expected the meal to end like that - other than those who'd listened carefully.

The year after, they re-enacted the meal, reclaimed their place at the covenant table. And the year after, and the year after that. Commanded to do so, they did so. Moving into that great Exodus on which they found Ten commandments, found manna on the ground and water from the rock. This journey of many meals reenacted brought them to many new expressions of your love and faithfulness. Even when they worshipped golden calves, grumbled about the journey, and tore their garments, you came to them in love and covenant faithfulness. "I will be your God, and you will be my people" you said. Every day you said it in many, many ways - and year by year, Passover by Passover, as bread was broken and cups were blessed, they remembered, just **that** side of remembering, that they had heard your promise, and known your love.

-ooOoo-

In a time just **this** side of our remembering, we celebrated the meal with **him**. Maybe we expected it to stay on script - a faithful rendering of our people's story - the memories we hold together. The food on the table, the wine in the cup; the staff propped up by the door, the sandals on our feet.

Just as it'd always been told, so we expected it to be told. But then when he breaks the bread, he speaks of his body. When he lifts the cup, he says "this cup is the new covenant in my blood" - in my blood?

Why is he speaking of covenant and blood? As if his life force, that which keeps him alive, is a new expression of how you are loving the world, and being faithful to it?

Over those three short years (maybe they just seemed short - when you're never still everything seems short), he'd moved us to think about faithfulness. In his stories about prodigal sons, and fig trees that grow, in his prayers that called you "Father" as if we were your children, in his embracing those of the covenant people who'd fallen to illness or judgment or possession by legions of demons. Where others turned away, he lived what could only be called "faithfulness" - like covenant faithfulness coursed through his veins, poured out in his blood. Was it strange that he called his body, his blood, expressions of people held in loving covenant?

Did we know, O God, what it meant? Did we know why it was important that we had our sandals on this time? Did we have any idea what soon would follow - the breathless race through the shadows to Pilate's hall and Rome's cross punctured Golgotha?

And we wonder, what will this meal mean for those who follow? Something just that side of what we remember, not ours, but ours all the same? A vision, a dream, a nightmare - or something only to be understood once an Easter morning has shed on it the transforming light of trust and faith? He is risen? Indeed?

A covenant meal for a covenant people.

We keep a moment of quiet.