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**Worship Theme: Rituals and Remembrance**

***“God is Big Enough”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
Season of Pentecost, Sunday, September 6, 2020  
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

**Exodus 12: 12-14**

*The First Passover Instituted*

<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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.

**Matthew 26: 17-19, 26-30**

*The Passover with the Disciples*

<sup>17</sup> On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?” <sup>18</sup> He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” <sup>19</sup> So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

*The Institution of the Lord’s Supper*

<sup>26</sup> While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” <sup>27</sup> Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; <sup>28</sup> for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>29</sup> I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” <sup>30</sup> When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Sermon

***“This day shall be a day of remembrance for you.”***

There have been quite a few comments

– you and I hear them, think them, say them aloud –  
comments about plagues.

We feel like we are living in the midst of them.

Covid-19.

El Niño.

Wildfires in California.

Locusts sweeping across east Africa.

Rising unemployment, businesses struggling.

Heightened tensions along racial and gender and class lines.

Individually they are tough.

How about all at the same time?

Even tougher.

Each one brings to the forefront grief and trauma, loss and heartache.

Stretching our resources.

Straining our resolve.

Stressing our relationships.

Last Sunday I preached that thanks to God our Creator, our brains are neuro-plastic.

We are malleable; we can adapt and grow, we’re formed, reformed, & transformed.

We’ve taught one another to appreciate unsung heroes,

extend helping hands,

pray fervently,

and serve diligently.

Speaking of hanging tough in tough times,

our church just finished repairing and restarting our AC unit

when a pipe burst on the upper level in our education wing,

pouring water unchecked for 15 hours, soaking three floors.

“What’s next?” I asked Rebecca Shaw, our church administrator. “Frogs?”

“Murder hornets,” said Rebecca Shaw.

There is nothing like a plague or three to make one rethink priorities.

***“This day shall be a day of remembrance for you.”***

The Book of Exodus provides the who, what, when, where, how and why

of an infliction of extremes to generate human liberation,

extremes inflicted to make folks rethink their lives and priorities.

Exodus opens with God listening.

Exodus introduces the qualities of God to us.

Here we meet the God of Empathy for the oppressed, the last, the lost, the least.

Here meet God as Judge over those who stray, who repress, hurt or harm the innocent.

Compassionate God heard the cries of the Hebrews,  
heard their groans and suffering, and was swift to respond.

Judgmental God witnessed hateful and monstrous behavior by Egyptians,  
and sought justice.

God drew Moses out of slavery, and called him to draw out, to deliver his people, as well.

Moses approached Pharaoh and said, *"Let my people go!"*

*"No,"* said Pharaoh.

God then sent ten plagues, one after another,  
to get Pharaoh's attention,  
to make him--and those complicit with him--most uncomfortable.

The first 9 plagues were:

water turning to blood,

frogs,

lice,

flies,

livestock pestilence,

boils,

hail,

locusts,

and darkness.

Egyptians and Hebrews suffered alike.

After each plague, Moses returned to the Pharaoh and said, *"Let my people go!"*

*"No."*

Pharaoh refused.

God got personal.

Preparations were made for the tenth plague.

Warned the Hebrews that God would return at night

to slay the firstborn in every home,

unless the mark of the blood of a lamb was upon the door.

Seeing the blood of the lamb,

God promised to pass over and pass by the home,

sparing the family such a tragedy.

God spoke through Moses:

*<sup>12</sup> 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.*  
<sup>13</sup> *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.*  
<sup>14</sup> *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: 12-14)*

***“This day shall be a day of remembrance for you.”***

Exodus speaks of the command from the Almighty to remember.  
You must remember this.  
This is important.  
Observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

And so, for generations upon generations, Hebrews did exactly this, in remembrance.  
They gave thanks for being saved physically from human bondage.  
They were grateful to be saved spiritually from being forced to adhere to false gods.  
They remembered their liberation in their past.  
They remembered they are being redeemed by God today and every day.

We, too, must remember this.  
Therefore, on Passover, on Maundy Thursday, we ask each other:  
*“Why is this night different from all other nights?”*  
We practice this ritual – and other sacred rituals -- to help us to remember,  
and to help us move forward, together, with God.

Jesus and the Disciples were observing Passover  
when they gathered in the Upper Room.  
As you know, scholars track the number of years of Jesus’ ministry  
based on the fact that in the Gospels  
Jesus of Nazareth observed Passover three times.  
Three Passovers, hence three years of ministry.

***“This day shall be a day of remembrance for you.”***

The practice of Passover by Jesus and the Early Church  
has been adapted into the weekly, regular ritual of Holy Communion.  
We do this in remembrance of Him.  
We do this in remembrance of the Lamb of God,  
who gave Himself for our sake,

for the redemption of all.  
We do this in remembrance of Christ,  
whose love shows us what is good, what is just, what is right and righteous.

***“This day shall be a day of remembrance for you.”***

Fear not, my friends.  
Be not afraid.  
We are not afraid.  
Plagues, chaos, one challenge after another, monsters in our midst,  
we straighten our backs and resolve and refuse to give in to fear.  
Every Sunday we gather around the Lord’s Table for the Bread and Cup,  
and here we remember the One who loves, who redeems, who delivers us  
from sin into virtue,  
from meanness into kindness,  
from death into new life.

We look reality in the eye and say to each other,

*“Fear not, my friends.*

*The Lord will provide.*

*Remember when we were here before? and how God delivered?*

*Where we are going, what is around the corner, through the mist,*

*God has already passed over and passed by and passed through.*

*Look around, look around, and see the presence of God, here and now!*

*We know God is present because the Christ in me sees the Christ in thee.*

*The Risen Christ is blessing us with love, with faith, with hope.*

*The greatest of these is love.*

*By the love of God in Christ, you are redeemed.*

***“This day shall be a day of remembrance for you.”***

Speaking of redemption, a neighbor was at the local supermarket.  
As she was checking out, she handed the clerk a coupon for 75 cents off.  
Suddenly it slipped and fell between the scale and counter and was lost from sight.  
The clerk looked distressed.

*“It’s okay,” said my friend. “It’s in Coupon Heaven right now.”*

*“Coupon Heaven?” asked the clerk.*

*“Yes, that is where coupons go when they die.”*

The clerk nodded and said, *“Only the redeemed.”*

If I had been there that day, I might have added,  
*“If God’s grace is true, then all coupons will be saved.”*

***“This day shall be a day of remembrance for you.”***

*19 ...the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.*

*26 While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."*

*27 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you;*

*28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*

*29 I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."*

*30 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

Our scripture from Matthew's Gospel takes place during Passover. Passover is a spiritual, liturgical expression of remembering the promise of God. The Lord will provide all the love we need.

As Jesus of Nazareth celebrates Passover with his friends,  
He is fully aware that He is the fulfillment of the promise.  
He is the one whom the Lord will provide.

Here is the Messiah, the Lamb of God,  
provided by the One who Created and Creates for our eternal salvation.  
As Jesus prepares for Passover, he must make the ultimate choice.  
The cross on Calvary awaits, as does suffering,  
as does certain death, as does the hope of resurrection.  
The Lord will provide life and life everlasting.

When Jesus participates in this Passover ritual  
it leads him to contemplate the choice he must make.  
He speaks aloud what is going through his mind,  
what is heavy on his heart,  
what is both troubling and calming his soul.  
In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke,  
in the Mount of Olives  
Jesus seriously considers whether he should *"let this cup pass"*  
by praying aloud,  
*"Abba, if you are willing, remove this cup from me;  
yet, not what I want, but what you want."*

However, in the Gospel of John  
there is no such wavering.  
No wondering what might be just ahead, around the corner.  
No contemplation of wandering away from what must be.

Jesus says, *"Now my soul is troubled.  
And what should I say—'Abba, save me from this hour'?  
No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.  
Abba, glorify your name."*

Then a voice came from heaven, saying,  
*"I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."* (John 12: 27-28)

The purpose of Jesus' prayer and life  
was not to be delivered from the Cross,  
but to glorify God's name.  
Yet by glorifying God's name in prayer, in worship, in ritual,  
He was delivered from death, into glorious resurrection.

***"This day shall be a day of remembrance for you."***

Ritual, when practiced with respect, joy, and sincerity,  
helps strengthen our resolve, our backs, our Beloved Community.  
*Abba, we glorify your name!  
When we break the Bread and take the Cup, we sing your praise.  
With you as our God, there is nothing, nowhere, we cannot tackle.  
In your name we are united to serve, agreeing to differ,  
resolved to love, breaking bread together.*

Rituals help us to remember that we are not alone.  
This Table, these practices of the Faith, they connect us, one soul to another,  
one church to another,  
one community to another,  
one world to its one true God,  
a God of Compassion and Justice.

We affirm that the practitioners of rituals of grace  
may be taken, transferred, transported from one place to another,  
with amazing, glorious effect.

*It is for this reason that we have come to this hour: Abba, glorify thy name.*

When I was called to make a move from Texas to Tennessee,  
Senior Minister Michael Mooty of East Dallas Christian Church  
stood in the pulpit and proclaimed, *"Let the Preacher preach."*

The Lord is calling the Rev. Henry Brewer-Calvert and the Rev. Anna Strickland  
to move from Atlanta to Iowa,

from First Christian Church of Decatur  
to serve as Co-Pastors of Central Christian Church of Waterloo.

Rev. Henry Brewer-Calvert,  
who was raised in this congregation from Second Grade and ordained last week,  
shared recently with the Commission on Ministry in Georgia  
about his experience in Fort Worth while at Brite Divinity School:

Henry said:

*“We can be the church even and especially in the midst of upheaval.  
When I was an Associate Pastor in Texas, my senior minister died.  
The next minister quit after 6 months.  
I kept working, kept serving, kept dancing.  
I leaned into God, leaned into my people, leaned into my call.  
I learned to ask for help.  
I learned we can pick each other up.  
I learned to have hope,  
and to share the hopes of one community with another.”*

Rev. Anna Strickland has been on staff here for four (4) too-short years.

In describing her call to be a minister of the Gospel, she preached from this pulpit:

*“God is not just bigger than oceans or mountains,  
but bigger than all the fears, doubts, and questions  
we could ever have.  
God is big enough to intimately know each and every one of us,  
and love us all the same.  
My daily prayer and motivation  
are to lead a life of love, kindness, and gentleness  
so that others will see God’s love in me.  
That is my faith; [it] has grown into my calling.”*

Clearly Henry and Anna embodied this call in our community of faith  
and have a good word to proclaim and a dance to share.

The Church of Jesus Christ will do well to listen  
and get ready to move, to shake its groove thing.

We send you with our love,  
our prayers,  
and a ritual to share with all souls,  
a ritual to help remember from whence you came,  
a ritual to ground your life and family and ministry,



a ritual to enlighten the Body of Christ.

Let the Preachers preach.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit! Amen.*