

Proper 18, Year A
September 6, 2020
St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church
Exodus 12:1-14
Rev. Sarah Chancellor-Watson

“The Holy Pretzel”

Over these past several months I’ve seen and heard many jokes about time having little to no meaning in our current circumstances – it’s the 5th Blursday of Marchtember, if anyone is keeping track. One of my clergy friends started labeling his sermons according to which Sunday in “Coronatide” we are in. I think even before now we’ve all had experiences where time does not follow the neat linear rules we wish it would. We’ve all had moments that seem to stretch out for forever as we wait for that last school bell to ring, or for the surgeon to come and give us an update. Other times it seems like time passes in the blink of an eye and suddenly it’s already the last day of a dream vacation or the child who were cradling in our arms just yesterday is now asking us if they can borrow the car. I think Doctor Who, the time and space traveling alien from the BBC show of the same name, said it best about the true nature of time, that time does not follow a linear pattern, but rather it is “a big ball of wibbly wobbly, timey wimey stuff.”

In our worship and in the rituals we practice we are reminded of and live into this mysterious nature of time, as we simultaneously remember what God has done for us and participate now in the inbreaking, but not yet fully realized, future of the Kingdom of God. My worship professor at Austin Seminary, Dr. Jen Lord, who has guest preached for us, called this phenomenon of time that particularly happens in worship and in our celebration of the

sacraments “the Holy Pretzel” – past, present, and future all folded up and intertwined with one another in the midst of the Holy.

Our text today is a continuation of the Exodus story we have been following for a few weeks now. Having heard the cries of God’s people in Egypt, God has called Moses, along with his brother Aaron to speak to Pharaoh and carry his message, “Let my people go.” God has seen his people languish in Pharaoh’s system of death and exploitation and acts their behalf for their liberation. What follows is a struggle, between the stubborn Pharaoh and the God of the universe. With each plague, God’s mighty power is on full display for not only the Egyptians, but also for the Hebrews who have spent many years wondering where God was and when he would show up and act. And with each plague God proves overwhelmingly who indeed has the power over creation, and over life and death itself. And now the moment has finally come for the people’s liberation – it’s go time.

The instructions we read here given to Moses and Aaron to disseminate to the people are full of urgency – as the moment of their liberation from their bondage in Egypt is finally at an end – but they are also full of an odd kind of specificity. There is an order and an intentionality in the instructions given for this final meal in Egypt and for the preparations to be made to leave. These words almost seem to belong more to the laws and religious codes of Leviticus rather than the Exodus narrative. It begins with a command to mark the beginning of a new year, a new month, a new day for the people. This radical reorientation of time emphasizes the new beginning for the people and a break from their old lives of slavery. The people must let go of the past and begin to live on God’s time, no longer reliant upon a system of exploitation that only brought them death and destruction, but instead relying upon God’s

provision and grace. From this day forward the month of their departure from Egypt marks the beginning of their future and it will orient God's people for all time to this new "freedom-time."

The specificity of the instructions is meant to ritualize the journey of freedom and God's liberating acts for future generations to participate in a fully embodied manner. It creates a cultural and spiritual touchstone for the people to return to year after year as they remember what God has done for them. Each piece of this meal is designed to recall this memory not only with words, but with actions. Perhaps you've been invited to and have participated in a Passover Seder meal, which is the modern iteration of this first Passover, creating a clear through line from the ancient ancestors to our modern-day Jewish friends. They still eat the bitter herbs, a sensory reminder of the grief and pain of those years of slavery. The bread is still made without leaven or yeast, another reminder of the haste and readiness with which this meal is to be eaten. And the lamb or whatever meat is available is to be roasted, cooked with fire essentially, a call back to the fiery bush from whence God first called Moses and of the pillar of fire that will guide the people along their journey out of Egypt. God's saving work of liberation requires participation, not a passive action of simple memory and recall. In participating in this active remembrance the people are invited to see God at work in their lives now and to live into the hope of the future that God has carved out for his people.

As Christians, we connect our own dots in this line to the Passover meal that Jesus shared with disciples on the night he would be betrayed and arrested. This Passover was Christ's last meal before his torture, death, and resurrection, providing us a connection between Christ's sacrifice and the continuation of the work of God's saving acts throughout history. Our own sacred ritual meal – The Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, The Eucharist -

patterned off of this particular Passover celebration with Jesus and his disciples, is punctuated by the words of Jesus as he said, "Do this in remembrance of me." It is likewise a meal of this same kind of embodied remembrance as the Passover. As we take in this meal we are reminded and we live into the truth that God has saved, God is saving, and God will save God's people from all the powers of sin, and death, and destruction, that seeks to oppress and separate us from the God who loves us and from one another.

These rituals of the Passover and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper remind us who we are as God's people, bind us together across time and space, and call us forth into the participation of the building up of God's kingdom. Next week in our worship we will be celebrating the Lord's Supper. So between now and then I invite you prepare to participate in the sacrament in your home with the same kind of intentionality and purpose of the Passover meal. Find a special loaf of bread, if you've got it in you bake it, and don't forget the grape juice or even if you so choose a nice bottle of wine. If you've got children in your house include them in these preparations. Set the table with a plate and a cup. None of it has to be fancy, but it's the thought that counts as we prepare ourselves to encounter the Divine in this meal, to get caught up in the Holy Pretzel of time, and be bound once again to one another as the living Body of Christ.