

Exodus 13

One way to understand this chapter is, as Kass (Founding God's Nation: Reading Exodus pg. 191) puts it, that this chapter marks the transition of the story from a tale of "freedom from" to a tale of "liberation for." What he means by that is that the story moves from God freeing God's people from slavery to Pharaoh to God creating a particular kind of people for a particular purpose. Please also note that Moses' role has changed. He is no longer the liberator but has become the teacher. We will later watch this role morph into that of Law Giver.

Though the story of freedom "from" is not quite over (we will still have the encounter with Pharaoh and his troops at the Red/Reed Sea), for all intents and purposes God's people are free from Pharaoh's domination. The question then becomes, what next? Are the people free to do as they please? Are the people now slaves to this God of their ancestors? Where will they go? All these questions will be shortly answered, but for the moment the people, if they are to continue to become a community as discussed in the last chapter, need a foundational story that binds them together. This story will be the story of the Passover and Exodus.

As we begin this chapter, we are told what the Hebrews are to remember/commemorate the mighty acts of God that brought freedom to God's people. This remembering/commemorating is to consist of ritual actions. These ritual actions are to remind the people of God that liberation was not Moses or Aaron's doing, nor was liberation the people's doing. Liberation was an act of God's mighty hand. The action which is to commemorate this mighty act is the keeping of the feast of unleavened bread during which the people will eat unleavened bread for seven days and then have a festival. This festival is to be held on the appropriate date of the new Hebrew calendar.

The second ritual action intended to help the people remember is that of the sacrifice/dedication of the first born. This sacrifice/dedication entails the sacrifice of the first lamb (meaning it will be killed and eaten...nothing going to waste) and the dedication to God of the first-born child. This child dedication accomplishes two things. First it is to remind the people of the price paid for the liberation of the Hebrew people, namely the death of the first born of Egypt. Second it reminds the people that God does not desire child sacrifice, only the gratitude of a people who are willing to commit their first born to God's service.

Where are the people to go? The immediate answer is to the land promised to their ancestors. The route the people will take however is not the shortest route. God avoids the most direct route because the most direct route is guarded by Egyptian fortresses and might cause the people to either have to fight or to flee back to slavery. Fortunately, the people do not have to worry about the exact route because God leads them day and night.

Reflection: Rituals are important. They are important because they remind existing generations of their story and teach each new generation about the values of the community. Consider our 4th of July parades that remind us of the sacrifices made for our freedom. Or the rituals of Holy week and Easter where we remember all that Jesus did to break the power of sin and make eternal life available for all. These rituals both remind and teach. Within Judaism the rituals of Passover and dedication have been kept for thousands of years and continue to shape members of the Jewish community. In a sense, they continually orient the community to God's ways because God was the liberator who brought the people out with a mighty hand.

Questions:

1. What are some of your favorite family/religious/community rituals?
2. Where have you seen the power of rituals in your life?
3. How would you describe what the Jesus' community has been created "for"?