

Ex 12:1-14

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 judgements: 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.

Sermon: Some Things Should Never Be Forgotten

Sometimes the humor used in advertising cuts a little close to the bone for my taste. For example there was a home security system ad where the husband asks his wife about the new alarm access code - she says it's simple, honey, it's our anniversary. At which point the hapless husband gets locked out of the house will all the bells and whistles blaring. Some things should never be forgotten.

I'm sure we've all forgotten anniversaries, birthdays, or other special occasions, but I have to admit I felt a little guilty last week when I was preparing for the service this Sunday. I like to look back at previous years - what scriptures we read, what hymns we sang when we had the opening day of Church School - and I noticed we sang "Eternal Father Strong to Save" back on September 10, 2006. For a minute I couldn't understand why we would pick that hymn and then I realized I'd forgotten about the anniversary of 9/11.

How could I ever forget about 9/11. The anniversary of 9/11 has conjured up anger, apprehension, rage and grief in my heart over the years, but I've always been keenly aware of its approach and very mindful of its observation.

I felt guilty when didn't remember. I thought of the words of the psalmist who wrote about remembering the fate of Jerusalem while exiles in Babylon: Psalm 137 By the rivers of Babylon- there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion... If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

Centuries later Bob Marley put that refrain, "by the rivers of Babylon" to a reggae beat and sang about the experience of all people who are political exiles, who are oppressed, who cannot feel at home in the dominant culture.

The people of Israel did not want to accommodate themselves to their new life in Babylon. Babylon was the land of estrangement from what they loved, and so they refused to resume a normal life there or settle into this foreign land.

But it is not just geography, politics and culture that can create a sense of exile - there can be emotional exile as well.

I know people who have felt that they were sitting by the waters of Babylon when events overtook them and their lives were changed irrevocably and forever by illness, accident, or the loss of a beloved friend, parent, sibling, spouse, son, or daughter.

In the emotional exile of grief they too are estranged from the life they knew - they are living as if in a foreign land. And sometimes, when the first moments of normalcy creep in, when the weight of grief is briefly lifted and they experience unexpected joy, they recoil - they feel they have accommodated the new reality, they have forgotten, been disloyal, acted as if nothing had happened.

Some things should never be forgotten, but forgetting for a moment may be the only way to survive and live again.

We have read from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's letters from prison in church before, but it is worth recalling what he said about God's presence in the exile of personal loss:

Nothing can make up for the absence of someone whom we love, and it would be wrong to try to find a substitute; we must simply hold out and see it through. That sounds very hard at first, but at the same time it is a great consolation, for the gap, as long as it remains unfilled, preserves the bonds between us. It is nonsense to say that God fills the gap; God doesn't fill it, but on the contrary, keeps it empty and so helps us to keep alive our former communion with each other, even at the cost of pain.

Remembrance is the basis of communion - and the basis of community. To sustain remembrance without being overwhelmed by it - this is the challenge. To do this we create rituals.

It seems to be an innate human trait to ritualize our remembrance - we see it across cultures, across religions, across the generations and ages.

This morning we read about how the origin of the Passover ritual for the Jews - roast the lamb on the fire, mark the doorposts of your homes, eat the lamb hurriedly, prepared to leave the place where you are dwelling. 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.

We also participated in the ritual remembrance of our Lord in the sacrament of communion - the Passover meal transformed. This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. This is my body, which is given for you. This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

And we asked a new group of teachers to take on the responsibility of fulfilling that simple and poignant request of Jesus to the disciples at the Last Supper: Remember me.

Some things should never be forgotten

That is what we are about here. We are here to remember, to keep alive our communion and build up our community. We are here to plant the stories and seeds of faith in the hearts of the next generation and to pray along with those making their way through the emotional exile of loss, grief, and temptation. We are here to sing the Lord's song in this land and to remember that some things must never be forgotten -

May God bless our teachers, our students, our families and community. May all our efforts to be a community of faith and remembrance bring glory to God in the year ahead.