

May 6, 2018

Exodus 16:9-30

Emerge "Let Go: Leaving Behind What We Don't Need"

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In 1965, the Beatles played Shea Stadium, Malcolm X was assassinated and "Goldfinger" had just hit the screens across the country.

It was also the year, 13 year old Jeff Cokeley, discovered an eastern box turtle in his backyard, carved his initials and the year "JC 1965" on the shell and then let the creature go.

Flash forward 47 years and the boy's 85 year old father, who still lives on the property, finds a box turtle in his backyard, turns it over and discovers it is the same one from all those years earlier.

Jeff is now 59 and lives in Rochester, NY. His father and the box turtle still remain in South Strabane, Pennsylvania. There they were, there they remained.

A butterfly's cocoon,
A bear's cave,
A mollusc's shell,
A snake's skin

All have something in common.
They need to be left behind...

Paper wrappers,
Plastic containers and aluminum cans,
Your bicycle with training wheels,
Your baby clothes,

All have something in common.

They too need to be left behind, and so do some other things in our lives, if we are going to move from where we are, to where we need to go.

The Bible gives us many stories about journeying and moving forward. For today, let's look at the Israelites in the desert.

Let's first take notice of their situation. They had been slaves in Egypt. The place where they had once found refuge had become their nightmare. For initially, Egypt had been their safety net and savior from the drought they faced in their homeland. Yet, later due to the death of a wife and son, and a change in position, and fear on the part of others, they became enslaved. Their safety net became a trap and their savior turned into their slayer.

So, when given the opportunity, they snatch it, and leave Egypt. They have left the cocoon, because it was too confining. Even though it had once been their womb where they were nurtured and cared for, it had now turned into their tomb. They had to get out and they did.

Before we can let go, we have to tell ourselves the truth about our story. Let's face it, we deceive ourselves sometimes, telling ourselves lies about our own story, and then we grow into believing them to actually be true. The Israelites romanticized their story, "Oh, it wasn't that bad! Matter of fact, we got three squares." Yet, the truth be told – that and so much more, and it wasn't good. We often tell ourselves that what is going on with us is okay. It's not that bad. That is till we check with someone who has an objective opinion, who is not so close to us as to have an obscured view, as we often do. We are so close to it, we cannot see it for all it fully is or is not!

In the facing of our past, we allows ourselves to have a future. So, we must appropriate the truth that we are not limited to, defined or confined by what has been dealt us, or by our own self inflicted wounds. Our destiny is not limited by what others or life have done to us. Nor are we defined and confined to what we have done to ourselves. Yet, if we are not careful we will stay in the mess we are in, by saying that all we know to date, is all that is out there. In other words, we will only have two time zones – the past and the present, and not three time zones as is God’s plan: the past, present and future.

Beyond Egypt was the dessert ,like sands in the hour glass, so were the days of their lives. Yet, there was also a future ahead of them, ripe with possibilities, if they would but continue taking risks, which always accompanies moving forward.

Now, I know we expect a lush garden or a palace as the new location (they did too), and yes that is what it might eventually be for us and did come to be for them. Yet, even despite this future reality, we initially might have to contend with a scorching sun beating down on our heads or a blistering wind in our face, or sand in our shoes and teeth!

Yet, as it was in the dessert, so can it be for us. We will not starve out there in the somewhat risky in-between state – that place between Egypt and the Promised Land because God knows our needs and will meet them.

The butterfly leaves the cocoon because where it has been cannot provide nourishment and being stuck in that location is not sustaining. Some of us are at a place, where we contemplate leaving the death trap that is strangling the life out of us ! Yet, it is important to note, that the dessert locale,

provided them with a new life. Yet, it wasn't going to be easy, but, it was going to be possible; God made sure of that!

What made the desert part of their journey possible: God's daily provision. That is the part of the story that we need to keep repeating to ourselves. There was refreshment every morning and every evening. Those two provisions from God was what sustained them. Why should we think we can get by in our desert travel with anything less. God is the provider, for the rough terrain that we must traverse to get to the land where we need to be: the land flowing with milk and honey. We are being sustained all the while we are on our way and thus we will be able to finally get to the place of great nourishment and sweetness.

So, let's check ourselves regarding complaining about what has been, and recognize what is, in the here and in the now, what is being given to us by God today, so we may have a better future. Let's not worry about getting what we need for tomorrow. Let's just gather what is falling from the sky today, gather up what God so generously gives us, then eat up, so as to be nourished, nurtured, and empowered, so as to be able to face whatever comes tomorrow, and thus in doing so, move into a brighter and amazing future.

The truth is, God has carved God's initials into our very own being. For each of us carries the letters and numbers: JC 2018. The question is whether we will stay within the parameters we have always had, or will we go forth from the land we know, so as to be able to enter the Promised Land?

HOLY COMMUNION

Invitation to the Table

St. James Church communed with Harmony Hall at Elwyn this week. There was quite a bit more food (thanks to all of your generous donations and great cooking) than we have here this morning. But, that's the length of how it differs.

For that meal, was to eaten together, like today's meal.

That meal was about getting nourishment, for the journey, like today's meal.

That meal was about giving and receiving love, like today.

It was about being united, sharing stores around the table about boots we have had, boats we have ridden in or wanted to, and animals we have had or wished we could have had.

That meal was about recognizing what we have in common, like today's meal.

That meal was also about recognizing our wounds and struggles and affirming that there is healing through love, like today's meal.

Prayer of Preparation

Let us pray.

Like our brothers and sisters at Harmony Hall, we come today, to your table, grateful for the fact that we are not alone, that you know, understand, and unconditionally love us. May the conversation we hear from you and see in the looking at one another be what we need to bring healing. We open ourselves to the nourishment you are proving for each of us for the journey we are on, and the journey we will need to take. Pour you love on, in, and through us. Amen.

Sharing of the Bread and Cup

On the night of his arrest, Jesus took bread, and after he had given thanks to God, he broke it and said, "Take eat, this is my body broken for you. After supper, he took the cup, and after giving thanks to God, said, "This is the cup of the new covenant, given for you, drink you, all of it."

The bread fallen from heaven – the bread of life

The cup of the new covenant – the cup of salvation

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Having now gratefully received the love, forgiveness, strength and healing we need, help us to go forth from this place being nothing less than nourishment and sustenance for those who undertaking the journey from the dessert to the Promised Land. Amen.