“Eating on the Run”

14th Sunday after Pentecost, Sept. 10, 2017, Year A

Exodus 12:1-14

First Congregational Church, UCC, Saugus, Massachusetts

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I just watched a movie called *The Founder*, the story of the origins of McDonald’s restaurants. In 1954, a traveling salesman named Ray Kroc made a call on a burger restaurant in San Bernadino, California, and it was so mobbed he had to wait in line for a very long time before he got to speak to the owners. The restaurant was so popular because they had figured a way to prepare and serve burgers, fries and shakes in practically in the time it took to take down customers’ orders. Kroc was astounded at the fast pace of the cooks and servers, made possible by the detailed research and planning done by brothers Mac and Dick McDonald. Thus was christened the era of “fast food” and the rest, as they say, is history.

How many of us came of age taking children to McDonald’s, and even as elders, putting them on our list of most-frequented restaurants? For better or worse, we can count on what McDonald’s meals will look like, taste like, and how much they will cost us (which is minimal). With sales now world-wide, it’s no wonder they stopped putting on their signs how many billions of burgers they have served. Their burger odometer has probably spun around many hundreds of times after they hit their first billion.

The advent of fast food was just the beginning. Cars were engineered to go faster. Doctors’ offices began to time visits to a certain number of minutes. Maternity stays and other routine medical procedures became shorter and shorter, until we stayed in the hospital for only a few days compared to perhaps weeks in days gone by. Smart phones allowed us to spend money quicker than ever before, as buying on-line became easier and more convenient. Factory farms churned out massive amounts of produce, not waiting for Mother Nature to call the shots, but adding chemicals and additives to speed up the growing process. We not only have fast food, but we have fast cars, fast medicine, and fast money.

Even the Exodus story runs with the theme of fast food. When the Israelites were captives in Egypt, God tells them to get ready to be set free. God is going to bring a terrible curse upon the Egyptians, but “pass over” the Israelites harmlessly. And after that devastation, it will be time to leave in a hurry. God tells them how to prepare their last meal, how to cook their lamb, goat and unleavened bread. Then, God tells them to get ready to take off at a moment’s notice, fully dressed for travel and standing up to eat their meals. God says, “This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord’s Passover.”

“Eat it in haste.” It seems that’s the way we’ve grown accustomed to eating our food on the run. I’ve been known to eat my breakfast on my way to church on Sunday, as I have to get up very early and it’s a 40-minute drive to Saugus. I used to feed my daughter snacks in the car when she was small, and even full dinners on the way to or from rehearsals or dance classes. I’ve read that the kids we raised in her generation are the most mobile, completely used to eating while driving.

Is that a good thing? Maybe not. It’s a rare family today that sits down for a meal together at the end of the day. I was raised in that tradition, and even today, if my family isn’t home when I am, I will still cook a meal and sit down to savor it alone with pleasure. An unhurried meal with people we are happy to sit down with is a true blessing.

There’s a movement in our country to take our hurriedness down a notch. It’s called by many names: Slow Food. Slow Money. Slow Flowers. Slow Education. These are efforts to slow down the pace of living to a more humane level.

Slow Food means farming for sustainability, that is, to scale back the quantity of food grown and to improve the quality, adding natural nutrients back into the soil and even “resting” land on alternate years. The number of organic farms has increased, run by twenty- and thirty-somethings who know fresh food is the healthiest for them and their families Slow Money is connected to the Slow Food movement, as start-up farms, co-ops and food banks need investors who will help them thrive and grown. Slow Flowers are grown locally without pesticides or additives to the soil; none are imported or grown on land owned by corporate farms. Consumers can visit where the flowers are grown and often are allowed to pick their own. Slow Education means not over-booking our children into two and three after-school activities, but allowing them to concentrate on learning and enjoying one sport or one lesson at a time that they really love. Slow learning means deeper learning, as the child comes to really understand the essence of what they are attempting to master.

Why, we wonder why, after all the technological advances in making our lives “easier,” is there this movement back to slowing our lives down? In a word: “Connection.” We’re missing connection with other people. As we race by each other on the way to the many places on our daily lists, we’re buzzing past other human beings at an outrageously fast pace. When was the last time we stopped to chat with a stranger who paused, like we did, to admire a bush full of roses that God created for simply for our pleasure?

Is there such thing as a Slow Church movement? It just so happens there is. And what does it mean to live as a Slow Church?

The Slow Church is a response to the megachurch movement, where the membership is so huge that few people get to know one another. Slow Church is resisting the attempt to “Mcdonaldize” church, making us “one size fits all.” That approach doesn’t work because our churches are all unique settings, ministering to a specific community with specific needs.

One pastor took as his cue to embrace the Slow Church movement a translation of John1:14 in *The Message*, which read, “The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.” Another pastor said, “The pace of American culture isn’t very conducive for spiritual growth, which requires stability and patience. It often means staying put in one place long enough to develop deep ties with a specific place and groups of people. You need to commit to a place and people — and let God throw you into the rock tumbler with those other people until the rough edges get rubbed off.”

And that awareness of how we interact with one another is only accomplished over time and with many honest conversations. And not just surface conversation like, “Hi, how are you today?” “Fine, and you?” No, this is real, nitty-gritty conversation, about how we see God working – or not working – in the world and in our lives. One pastor said, “(The idea of Slow Church) isn’t some great new thing….This is an old thing that we are trying to slow down and pay attention to.”

In some ways, our church has lived in and out of Slow Church. Once in our younger days, we did know everyone intimately who attended. They lived in town as long as we did and knew as much about us as we knew about them. Although we may not have been open and vulnerable to them in words, it is certain that many knew what was going on in our lives even if we never told them.

This town has changed over the years. To many newcomers, it’s a place to rest their bodies at the end of their work day. It’s a commuter town, one in which necomers don’t get much involved in ways other than to perhaps shop at the local supermarket. So, how can the church provide what both newcomers and long-timers may be seeking?

In a review of a book called Slow Church, Sojourners Magazine wrote, “(This book) explores being church in a way that emphasizes deep engagement in local people and places, quality over quantity, and in all things taking the long view―understanding individuals and congregations as participants in the unfolding drama of all creation. . . . The strength of this book is in its consistent encouragement to reorient ourselves through prayer, scripture, and practice to God's abundant gifts and wellspring of possibilities, even in broken places and circumstances. While (this in itself) doesn't work miracles (remember, we're talking slow) on tight church budgets, neighbors struggling…, or conflict in community, it does open us up to material and spiritual resources we might otherwise overlook and remind us that transformation, though it may be a long time coming, is promised to us and all creation….” (Julie Polter, *Sojourners*, September/October 2014). I ordered this book and will consider it for a future adult study series.

And doesn’t that come full circle to the place we began: God’s promises of protection and abundance to those Israelites on-the-run. God said to prepare to move out whenever God said the time was right. And God specifically promised to be their God if they would be God’s people. Are we God’s people? Are we ready to provide a place where the community can slow down and savor what God has given us, and to share with the world the lessons a deep and abiding faith have taught us? Then, my friends, we are ready to continue *slowly, deeply and faithfully* to create the kind of church that will make people feel as grateful as we are to have found. Thanks be to God. Amen.

References

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