

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
 East Moline, Illinois
 Pastor Becky Sherwood
February 27, 2022, Transfiguration Sunday
 Exodus 34:29-35, Luke 9: 28-36
Preparing for Our Exodus

What comes to mind when you hear the words “The Exodus?”

Do you think of the beginning of the story and Moses standing by the burning bush, being told by God that he will lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land?

Do you think of Moses arguing with Pharaoh, and then the plagues that descended on Egypt when Pharaoh said no, he wouldn't let the people go?

Do you think of Moses (or Charleton Heston) holding up his staff and parting the Red Sea, and all of Israel walking safely to the other side,
 while Pharaoh's army and their horses and chariots drowned?

Do you remember the pillar of cloud leading the Israelites by day, and the pillar of fire by night? When the people arrived at Mt. Sinai God called Moses up on the mountain, and sent him back down the mountain with the message that the Israelites should prepare for three days and on the third day God would descend in a cloud over Mt. Sinai and speak to Moses so the people could hear God speak?

When you hear the words “the Exodus” ...

Do you think of Moses coming down the mountain with the 10 commandments on two stone tablets?

Or is it the stories of the 40 years of wilderness wanderings, and the Israelites complaining, and God sending them quail and manna to eat, and fresh water to drink?

Or do you think about the Promised Land they were traveling toward, and what it must have been like when they finally saw the Land God had promised them 40 years before, when they were slaves in Egypt?

The Exodus was the story of faith that defined who the Israelites were and how they understood themselves as God's chosen people.

It is the story that every Jewish child would have learned and known as well as they knew their own name.

It would have been part of their lifeblood.

It was part of their identity;

it shaped how they looked at the world.

The story of the Exodus was practically in their DNA.

The Exodus was their story of being chosen by God.

It was their story of being saved.

It was their story of new life.

Luke tells us that when Jesus lived on earth, he went up to a mountain to pray. He took three of his twelve disciples: Peter, James and John with him. These three Jewish men, and their Jewish teacher and friend Jesus, would have all learned and known the stories of the Exodus from the time they were very small.

It was the story of their people, their families, their nation;

it was the story that shaped how they understood God and understood the world.

The Exodus was the story they knew in their bones.

And when they got up on that mountain and Jesus began to pray, a part of that story they knew by heart began to take shape around them.

Can you even imagine what that must have been like for those three disciples?

While they were on that mountain Jesus was transfigured before them, he was changed before their very eyes. His face changed and began to glow and his clothes became dazzling white and suddenly those three Jewish sons saw their heroes of faith Elijah and Moses, long-dead, now alive and standing with Jesus.

Luke is the only one who reports what Moses and Elijah said to Jesus. And as many times as I've read this story and preached on this story, this week is the first time I feel like I've really heard this part of the story. Luke writes: "Moses and Elijah appeared in glory and were speaking of Jesus' departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." (Luke 9:31)

What's been so amazing to me this week is that the literal translation of this sentence from the Greek is: "Moses and Elijah appeared in glory and were speaking of Jesus' exodus, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."

Can you imagine what that experience and those words would have meant for Peter, John and James? Jesus' Exodus journey was beginning. When they heard their heroes of the faith talking about Jesus going on an Exodus journey to Jerusalem, think of all the images and memories that would have been swirling around and through those disciples!

The foundational story of their faith took place when Moses had gone up on Mt. Sinai,

And now they had gone up a mountain with Jesus.

They knew the story from Exodus we read this morning: Moses' face shone every time he talked to God. In fact his face was so bright he wore a veil over it when he talked to the Israelites,

These three disciples now watched Jesus' face and his clothes change on that mountain and begin to shine a dazzling white.

No one had to tell them what that meant.

It meant God was there on that mountain with them.

The story they knew in their bones was taking place right before their eyes.

And just as Moses met God on the mountain long ago,

now Jesus was meeting Elijah and Moses on this mountain.

Elijah represented all their prophets through history; he was the prophet who never died but was taken up into heaven in a chariot.

Moses represented all the laws of the Jewish people, first given in the 10 commandments back on Mt. Sinai.

And these two heroes of the faith, the symbols of the prophets and the Laws of God, talked to Jesus about his Exodus that he would accomplish in Jerusalem.

Then as Moses and Elijah began to leave, a cloud descended over them, and those disciples would have known what that meant. It meant God was coming, just as God had come in a cloud to speak to their ancestors on Mt. Sinai. No wonder they were terrified as they entered the cloud.

And God spoke from the cloud and said: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

Every year on the Sunday before Lent begins, we stand on this mountain with Jesus, and the story of Jesus' Exodus that begins there is the story we are called to know by heart.

It is the story of the Son of God, who came and lived our human life on earth,
 who taught and healed and proclaimed that God's Kingdom had come to earth.
 He loved the unlovable, and welcomed those without power: women and children and
 lepers and prostitutes, and simple fishermen and hated tax collectors.
 He said that God's love was for everyone,
 and he chose to show God's love no matter what the cost was.
 His way of telling God's story got him into trouble with the religious leaders of his day,
 and they used the power of the Roman government to have him crucified on a cross,
 and he died and was buried in a borrowed tomb.

But Jesus' Exodus story didn't stop with death,
 because three days later God raised Jesus from death to new life.
 And when Jesus ascended from earth and entered the Promised Land of Heaven, he
 opened the door to Heaven to each one of us.

As we stand on the mountain with Jesus this morning, as we have stood each Sunday before
 Lent begins again,
 God is still speaking to us the words that echoed from the cloud long ago:
 "This is my Son, my Chosen, Listen to him!"

That is why you will find a copy of these words in your bulletins this morning. I encourage you
 to take them home and put them in a place that you will see them throughout the season of Lent that
 begins this coming Tuesday, March 2nd on Ash Wednesday. May these words be a reminder to you
 to Listen! as you see them on your mirror, in your car, in your locker, beside your bed. Pick a place
 where you will see them daily!

If you are Livestreaming this service, you can find the words in the email that was sent out
 Friday, or just write the words on a piece of paper and put them where you will see them.
 "This is my Son, My Chosen, Listen to Him."

Because this Exodus story, Jesus' Exodus story is our story of faith.

It is the story that shapes our understanding of being chosen by God, to be God's
 children.

Jesus' Exodus Story is our story of salvation.

It is our story of new life through Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

God is calling us into Lent this morning with these same words:

"This is my Son, my Chosen, Listen to him!"

Please take these words home with you because they will guide us in Lent to know in deeper
 ways the new life we have been given in love, by Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.