

Beyond Welch's and Wonder Bread: The Importance of Passover and Communion
Exodus 12
October 4, 2020
Troy Taylor

In the live service on Sunday, I'm going to be taking a small survey of the congregation about holidays. If you are watching this online, or reading it in the sermon notes, I won't be able to hear your answer, but take a minute to think about this question:

What do you think is the biggest holiday on the calendar? Why?

When you think of the calendar through the lens of the bible, does your answer change?

Mine does. I think that as a culture, we celebrate Christmas as the biggest holiday of the year. Often we have a few days off, two weeks from school, loads of traditions that I love: colorful lights shining in the darkest part of the year, a tree and special decorations set up around the house, gifts that hide their secrets for a week or two under that tree, until they are exposed with joy and laughter on Christmas morning. It's also got television specials, family gatherings, turkey dinner with cranberry sauce (still properly in the shape of the can if it's real tradition!). Then, the gifts are packed up, the wrapping is recycled, and Boom! It's the New Year.

Traditionally, though, the true center of the Christian calendar is not Christmas. It's Easter.

True, without Christmas, there could be no Easter, but I am not wanting to argue what came first: the Santa or the bunny. Easter is the celebration that reminds us about the fulcrum, the pivot point, of creation: the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, and his resurrection.

Easter also ties Christianity to the most important event on the Jewish calendar, and shows us how our story is inseparable from the Jewish story of the Old Testament. I'm talking about the Passover.

The Passover, just like our Christmas, has a lot of meaningful traditions. A whole family would eat a meal together, including a lamb that was freshly sacrificed at the temple. They would eat it at night, with several special sauces and side dishes, and finish the night singing songs called the Hallel – Psalms 113-118 in our bibles. All of these things were done specifically to teach and remind the people. See what Exodus 12:26 says:

And when your children ask you, 'what does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.'

The Passover is a cultural tradition that has been observed over thousands of years. There is no way for us to come to a full understanding of it in one sermon. However, I do want to highlight a couple of thoughts from it.

What were they reminding the children of?

The key points of their story.

First, it is an anchor to generations that follow of their origins and their identity. In the Passover ritual, recited each year, every Jew confesses that he or she was a slave in Egypt and was redeemed through God's mighty deeds. This is not a symbol, or an empty repetition – it is a personal identification with the story of a people, the defining moment in their history when they became, at a fundamental level, who they are. It acknowledges the community basis for how the individual becomes who they are.

Second, it is rescue. God, reaching in with his mighty arm, through the oppression, and chaos, disaster, and pulling a group of slaves out of their prison, setting them free. There is absolutely no way that the people could rescue themselves. After all, they'd been there for four hundred years. You'd think that in that time, someone would have tried. But one doesn't run from Egypt. They were the super power of their day. The exodus is a story of gods battling, and in the end, one was left with his army drowned, his power broken, and his hold on enslaved people destroyed. The other, the true God of the Israelites, led a victory procession into the wilderness.

Finally, it is mission: God did not save the Israelites just to bring them out into the desert, pat them on the rear and tell them to make the most of it, now run! He saved them to something. To become the people of God. Those who would not only inherit the promise of the land, but also the gift of the covenant. God would be their God, and they would be his people.

Why are we focusing on this today? Because this is the foundation for a ritual that we participate in every month in our denomination: communion. When we take communion, we remember, and celebrate our own participation around the Lord's table, as though we were physically present, and therefore also at the foot of the cross, and again at the empty tomb. We are part of the story, not receivers only! We physically tear the bread, and pour out the wine, the very acts of violence against the body of Jesus, the one who rescues us from our impossible dilemma, and inevitable destruction.

And finally, perhaps most importantly, we are prepared, set apart (the ten dollar theological word for this is sanctified), for the mission of God. We are tied in with the people of God from around the world, each of whom eat the same bread and drink from the same cup. There are not many churches, there is the church. There are not many people of God, we are the people of God.

It is so much more than Welch's and Wonder bread. It is the very specific action of the redeemed people of God preparing to go into the wilderness and become the moving hand of God in creation. That is incredible: that we are the moving hand of God in our relationships, healing, encouraging, helping, and giving. It is who we have been, who we are, and who we need to be. Most importantly right now, in a divided, angry, social media shallow world of relating, that the church is needed to step in, and be that rooted, anchored sense of reality for people who do not yet know or understand what the true Christian story is. There is no specific application from today's message: if you really want one, then it's "do everything in the bible." But there is specific encouragement: in the work you do as a follower of Jesus, you are never alone. Let that sink in for a while. You are never alone.

In the era of a global pandemic, it is unwise for us to share a communion meal physically. But online, we have a very special communion service available. As a reminder that we are not alone, our sister church, Iglesia de Dios in Arrechavaleta, Cuba, is sharing their communion service with us. It is in Spanish, but we've subtitled the video for you. Today, as you watch, remember the unity that this meal celebrates: you are anchored into a story thousands of years in the telling, personally, physically, and intentionally. You have been saved from your impossible dilemma of slavery to sin and death. And together, we are the called, equipped, and sent people of God, to do good in our world.

Amen.