

12 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, 2 “This month will be the first month; it will be the first month of the year for you. 3 Tell the whole Israelite community: On the tenth day of this month they must take a lamb for each household, a lamb per house. 4 If a household is too small for a lamb, it should share one with a neighbor nearby. You should divide the lamb in proportion to the number of people who will be eating it. 5 Your lamb should be a flawless year-old male. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6 You should keep close watch over it until the fourteenth day of this month. At twilight on that day, the whole assembled Israelite community should slaughter their lambs. 7 They should take some of the blood and smear it on the two doorposts and on the beam over the door of the houses in which they are eating. 8 That same night they should eat the meat roasted over the fire. They should eat it along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 9 Don't eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over fire with its head, legs, and internal organs. 10 Don't let any of it remain until morning, and burn any of it left over in the morning. 11 This is how you should eat it. You should be dressed, with your sandals on your feet and your walking stick in your hand. You should eat the meal in a hurry. It is the Passover of the Lord. 12 I'll pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I'll strike down every oldest child in the land of Egypt, both humans and animals. I'll impose judgments on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. 13 The blood will be your sign on the houses where you live. Whenever I see the blood, I'll pass over you. No plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

13 The Lord said to Moses: 2 Dedicate to me all your oldest children. Each first offspring from any Israelite womb belongs to me, whether human or animal.

3 Moses said to the people, “Remember this day which is the day that you came out of Egypt, out of the place you were slaves, because the Lord acted with power to bring you out of there. No leavened bread may be eaten. 4 Today, in the month of Abib, you are going to leave. 5 The Lord will bring you to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. It is the land that the Lord promised your ancestors to give to you, a land full of milk and honey. You should perform this ritual in this month. 6 You must eat unleavened bread for seven days. The seventh day is a festival to the Lord. 7 Only unleavened bread should be eaten for seven days. No leavened bread and no yeast should be seen among you in your whole country. 8 You should explain to your child on that day, ‘It's because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.’ -Common English Bible

It seems almost every day this week, and indeed on many days for the past several years, in my daily dip into the news, I hear about massive groups of people fleeing

their homes due to war, or natural disaster, or poverty... This week it was people in Lebanon piling into cars and cattle trucks making their way to Beirut— will that be safer than home? It was people in Florida anticipating another massive hurricane and people in Georgia and the Carolinas dealing with devastation from that hurricane. For almost a full year it has been Gazans... for years it has been Ukrainians... Not so long ago Afghans and Syrians.... And surely there are Sudanese and Congolese people on the move. And we know that there has been a massive movement of people from central and South America north. Mass migration, it is not a new phenomenon.

We've once again jumped way ahead in the biblical narrative. Where we last left things, Joseph was assuring his family, the roots of the people of Israel, that they would be safe and cared for in Egypt. Perhaps you also remember that Joseph's brothers, in their guilt and fear over what they had done to him, vowed to be his slaves. It did not seem that Joseph intended for this kin to be slaves in Egypt. But indeed when a pharaoh arose who did not know Joseph, and the Israelite population in Egypt had grown quite large, the Israelites did indeed become slaves of the Egyptian empire. And they were subjected to increasingly brutal and harsh treatment... including the murder of their baby boys. Perhaps you recall this from Moses' birth narrative. I'm sure most of us had Sunday school lessons about Moses in the bulrushes, Moses in his basket floating down the Nile, Moses found by Pharaoh's daughter and raised in the royal court. This whole scenario was set up by the royal order that all Hebrew boy babies should be killed. Hard labor, regular violence, terror... these were the circumstances of the Israelites in Egypt. And these circumstances prompted a mass migration that took decades to complete.

With the two excerpts we read this morning we are offered a window on a moment before this migration began. The moment of the final, awful plague that led Pharaoh to release his grip and send the Hebrews on their way. Of course Pharaoh then later changed his mind and chased them, resulting in the dramatic moment at the crossing of the Sea of Reeds. But at this moment, they are in their homes in Egypt, and they are being coached on the ritual they are to undertake in the midst of the last plague, and the preparations they are to make for the long journey ahead, and indeed the ritual they will engage when they arrive in the promised land of milk and honey.

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There's a great deal of urgency and haste in the story today, but there's also waiting. The most curious detail that I absorbed in my study this week is that they were told to secure an unblemished year old lamb, either sheep or goat, on day 10 of the month, one per household, and watch it for four days prior to slaughtering it at twilight on the 14th day. Watch it? One scholar suggests that this was to ensure that it remains unblemished. Another notes that there is a similar element in the Islamic festival of Eid al Adha— the lamb for the feast is to be kept for a time so that it becomes more dear to the family, so the sacrifice of it feels more poignant— recalling Abraham's sacrifice or attempted sacrifice of a son. In any case, there is both haste and deliberateness. Instructions for how to cook the lamb, and how to eat it— awkwardly with your walking stick in your hand— and completely, nothing left over, leftovers to be burned. Hurry up, be ready to run, but wait...

The four day wait, is perhaps preparation for the forty year wait before arrival in the promised land. And the giving of ritual for use in the promised land, 7 days of unleavened bread as pictured in our focal image today, seems quite premature. They haven't even crossed the sea yet. They have a long, difficult journey ahead, and they are being commanded to honor a ritual when they get there. Perhaps this is to inspire the hope needed for the journey, but it is definitely intended to make sure that the memory of deliverance persists for generations to come. It didn't take long for the Israelites to forget the hell of their lives in Egypt and even to wish they were back there. Sometimes when God moves us out of one situation, it takes some time before we are settled into a new and better situation. And in that in between time, we can forget why we started moving at all. Ritual is helpful in the in between times and in the settled times. Ritual can help remind us of our dependence on a good and providing God. Yes, ritual can be empty and rote, but it can also be a powerful tool for helping new generations to come to faith and pass the story on.

This is what Passover has become for Jewish people across time and space. A time when they come to understand themselves anew as delivered from Egypt and help their children to have this understanding as well. And I think it is what our rituals of Sunday worship are intended for too... every week we remember the gift of forgiveness mediated by Christ and monthly we enact this at Christ's table. We claim

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our identity as beloved, forgiven, and empowered children of God through our worship rituals.

Though most of us are not directly a part of a mass migration, as the climate continues to change and global conflict intensifies and the rate of technological change increases exponentially, we are all experiencing some sort of massive transition. And we know that for many this is not a metaphor but a concrete, physical reality. I take from our stories this week, that we ought to be deliberate in our preparations in the midst of the season of change, ready to move at God's prompting, and ever committed to remembering God's activity in our world and lives.

Increasingly people all around us have no use for organized religion. They scoff at repeated rituals and question the integrity of institutions. If our rituals are empty, if we are just going through motions, if we are showing up just because that's what we've always done, they have every right to scoff. But if we show up ready to remember, to be encountered, to reconnect... let them scoff. Let them see the difference it makes when you surrender to worship of God. And make sure the children in your life, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, neighbors even, are given a multi-sensory experience of the goodness of God that will allow them to connect and keep the memory alive.

For Jewish people it may be matzah and bitter herbs and lamb, for us bread and cup, and water from a font, these are precious tools for supporting a community ever in transition.

Resources in addition to scripture that influenced the writing of this sermon: Amy Robertson and Robert Williamson Jr. [Episode 604 Ritual and Memory \(Exodus 12:1-13 & 13:1-8\)](https://www.biblewormpodcast.com/e/episode-604-ritual-and-memory-exodus-121-13-and-131-8/) on their *Bible Worm Podcast*, <https://www.biblewormpodcast.com/e/episode-604-ritual-and-memory-exodus-121-13-and-131-8/>