

Exodus 12:1-11
Unleavened Bread
Sunday March 12, 2017

Many of you know I was a youth pastor for 24 years. I worked for 3 years as a Youth/Christian Education Pastor at Kavanaugh UMC in Greenville Texas while attending seminary. I then served 21 years at First UMC of Mesa in the same capacity. And before both of these appointments I worked for 3 years with Young Adults at Catalina UMC here in Tucson. I spent a lot of my life with young people, and a lot of my life eating fast food.

To this day I could tell you where most of the McDonalds are in the Tucson area, and some of the best “What A Burgers” on I10 between here and Louisiana. I remember on one of our trips, we were so pressed for time, that we ate 6 meals in a row at McDonalds: breakfast, lunch and dinner for two days straight.

The favorite fast food for our Sunday Night program was pizza. I had a youth sponsor named Bob who once ask me after the 6th Sunday in a row that we were served Pizza, “Your cholesterol numbers must be sky high?!” I was too embarrassed to say, “Yes!”

Anyway the promise of fast food is freedom of time. It’s a bit costly, but it is fast. There is no prep time, no cooking time, no clean up. You buy it, you choke it down, you throw the paper products away. Quick, easy and efficient, maybe even a bit delicious, but good for you?

Anyway, this Lent, I invite you to consider another type of fast food, one found in the Bible. In our reading from Exodus, we have the original fast food. God’s people were enslaved in Egypt and had cried out to God for deliverance. God heard their prayers and pleas and used a series of plagues to change the mind of the Pharaoh to set them free.



Before the last plague, which was the destruction of the firstborn, God commanded his people to eat a special meal. There were to kill a sheep or goat, put its blood on the doorposts of their homes. They were to roast it and **eat it with bitter herbs and unleavened bread.**

And as Exodus 12:11 says, **“This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the Passover of the Lord.”**

The TEV translation puts it this way, **“... you are to eat it quickly, for you are to be dressed for travel...”** Fast food, unleavened bread, God was about to deliver them from slavery. The angel of death would pass over the homes marked with lamb’s blood, but visit the other homes with the death of the firstborn. A drastic measure was need to free God’s people from their oppressors. And when it happened, they needed to be ready to go, immediately! They needed their fast food to go!

Have you ever eaten matzah? Matzah is the Hebrew word for unleavened bread. You can buy it in most grocery stores in the ethnic food section. It’s a flat bread that when baked has the look of a cracker. Here is a picture of common Matzah on the screen.



Note the stripes and the piercings. A Jewish Rabbi said the thin nature of the Matzah and the piercings are so that it can cook quickly (In 18 minutes) so that if per chance there is any yeast left in it, it is quickly destroyed by the heat.

But when we as Christians see Matzah we often think of Isaiah 53:5, which says, **“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities;... And by His stripes we are healed.”** NKJV

The bread is flat because it is made quickly without yeast. Most bread takes time to rise. It rises because yeast works in the dough producing gas, which over time will cause the dough to expand by

producing tiny bubbles in the bread. Again this we see in the bread on the left on the cover of our bulletins and on the screen.



But the Passover meal was different. There was no time to allow the bread to rise. God's people were in a hurry. God was about to rescue them, and they had to be ready to go. They didn't have time to wait for bread to rise, be cooked, and a leisurely meal. They needed to be ready to travel. They needed to be ready for freedom.

But there was another reason for the unleavened bread. It symbolized a break from the past. People would use a pot of starter to make their bread, a piece of fermented dough from the bread made the day before.



They would add it to the new dough they were mixing; so it would ferment. A piece of that new fermented dough would then be stored away, and used as starter for the next loaf of bread. This is exactly how the Sour Dough Bread was made that we tasted today.

By making unleavened bread, God's people were concretely demonstrating their break from the past. It wasn't just bread starter they left behind. They had lived in Egypt for 400 years and had learned the Egyptian language, culture, and religion. God wanted them to have a clean, complete break with Egypt in every way. God particularly wanted them to break from the culture and religion.

If God was going to create a new people with new laws and faith practice, they needed a clean complete break from their past.

Leaving Egypt behind, leaving slavery behind and accepting freedom was something so important that God commanded it to be remembered every year and that memory passed on from generation to

generation. That is why the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread came to be celebrated year after year.

As Exodus 13:7-10 demands, “Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen in your possession, and no leaven shall be seen among you in all your territory. You shall tell your child on that day,

‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.’ It shall serve for you as a sign ... so that the teaching of the Lord may be on your lips;

for with a strong hand the Lord brought you out of Egypt. You shall keep this ordinance at its proper time from year to year.

Leaving Egypt behind was something every generation needed to do. It is something every Christian needs to do and the season of Lent is for us to examine our lives to see what needs to be left behind.

Now as you know there is a huge difference between leavened and unleavened bread. Leavened bread is the bread of those who are comfortable, and settled, those with homes and kitchens with ovens. These are people with time to let bread rise.

But matzah, unleavened bread, is the “bread of affliction,” the bread of those in turmoil and transition, the bread of those in need of rescue and deliverance. Matzah is the bread of those who need changes in their lives, because life isn’t working. Matzah is for all who yearn for freedom.

And we as Christians define that freedom as freedom from sin. Yeast in the Old Testament was also seen as a symbol of sin. To rid one’s life and house from yeast, as the Jews did before the celebration of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, was a symbol of leaving sin behind and all the temptations and slavery of Egypt.

Like Matzah, Lent is a season of the year that unsettles us if we truly examine our hearts and lives. We are not in bondage to Egyptian

oppressors, but we are indeed slaves. Jesus said, **“Everyone who commits sin is a slave sin.”** John 8:34

Lent is the season that will not leave us unsettled, comfortable, or well-fed, especially if giving up a food or drink item. That is why we give something up for Lent. It reminds us of our daily struggle against sin and temptation and that with the power of God we can succeed.

It is a particularly good time of year to pray the part of the Lord’s Prayer, **“Lead us not into temptation (or hard testing) but deliver us from evil (when we are tested help us to choose the good and not the evil.)”**

Prayer, repentance, fasting, and sacrificial giving are disciplines of Lent. This is one good reason for the Miracle Sunday Offering occurring in Lent. This is a time of sacrifice and sacrificial giving.



You might have wondered why the Lamb lying tied up on its side is the background for our slides. Notice the halo? This is a painting called **“Agnus Dei” (the Lamb of God) by Francisco Zubaran.**

It reminds us that our freedom from sin has been bought by the blood of another firstborn, the firstborn of God whose blood was not smeared on door frames, but flowed down a roughhewn cross. Indeed the cross, the doorway to eternal life.

Prayer, repentance, fasting, and sacrificial giving are marks of those who look to God for deliverance from the power of sin.

Lent calls us to leave Egypt behind and look to Christ alone. God’s people are called to be **‘in the world but not of the world’** John 17. We are called to live counter “to” culture, resisting the seductive invitation to live for self alone. That will enslave us.



Wealth, power, and pleasure are the gods we are called to leave behind today, to reject the lie that these old ancient pagan gods will give us happiness, joy, purpose and peace.

We are called to follow Jesus and find that in relationship with him we have abundant life, joy, purpose and peace beyond anything the world can give.

The Passover Meal included both unleavened bread and roasted lamb. It was the lamb's blood that saved the Israelites from the angel of death.



Today it is the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ that takes away the sin of the world and saves us from death. John 1:29.

Have you ever wondered why in Holy Communion we sometimes eat those thin wafers that taste like cardboard? They don't look or taste much like bread.



It comes from the tradition of using unleavened bread for Holy Communion. Not all churches, and certainly not this church, follow that tradition, but it is a helpful one if you know why.

Unleavened bread was the original fast food for people ready to travel, yearning for freedom. It is a good reminder to us that we in this sermon series "Bread for the Journey" are on a journey together to the Cross of Jesus Christ and the freedom from sin and death that his resurrection promises on Easter.

May we rid our lives of the yeast of sin, and be ready to travel, to travel to the Promised Land with Christ.

What is God saying to you and what are you going to do about it?

In Jesus's name, Amen

Based on "Bread for the Journey" Rolf Svanoe