Sunday School Commentary Lesson

By

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Passover, Exodus 12:1-14

I had the privilege of attending Passover with some Jewish friends once. There was a mood of celebration and expectation in the air. The evening was filled with liturgy, songs, eating and telling the story of God's deliverance of God's Children. The food of Passover also helped tell the story of God's faithfulness. The children were made an active part of the festival and even given portions of the story to read. It was a joyous occasion and great pride was taken in making sure the children understood the reason for Passover.

As Christians, we recognize that Jesus our Savior, breathed new life into the traditional Jewish Passover meal. There is much we can gain though by rediscovering our common Old Testament Jewish heritage, as a people of the marked door. What does Passover mean to you?

Commentary Lesson

The Passover was the principal act of salvation by the Lord in the Old Testament. The Passover dates back to the time of Moses. The Israelites were suffering as slaves in Egypt. God heard their cries for relief and used Moses to rescue God's people. A long series of plagues came down upon Egypt from frogs, and locusts, to turning the water into blood... Moses went to Pharaoh repeatedly. "Return to Pharaoh and make your demands again. I have made him and his officials stubborn so I can display my miraculous signs among them." (Exodus 10:1) The Pharaoh and his advisers wouldn't allow the Hebrews to leave or they would only set free the men to go and worship the Lord their God.

Finally the ultimate final plague came upon Egypt, the death of their firstborn sons. "The Lord said to Moses, 'I will bring one more plague upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt" (Exodus 11:1). Every first born was to die. But God instructed Moses to have all the Israelites smear blood on their door posts and the death angel would pass over that home and spare that family. "The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see blood, I will pass over and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt." (Exodus 12:13)

The central theme is the Lord's decisive action to free God's people by killing the first born of Egypt. God does for God's people what they were unable to do for themselves: gain their freedom to serve God rather than Pharaoh. God's actions free Israel to live as the people whom God created them to be. The Passover was to be a yearly festival to remember and celebrate God's salvation of his people.

This festival is clearly Jewish. No doubt Christians need Jews to help us concretely engage these practices, but the Christian community needs to move beyond curiosity about Jewish practices in order to claim these festivals as our own. This, of course, does not mean to usurp or push to
the side Jews, but to see that as the Old Testament is Christian Scripture even while it is thoroughly Jewish. So this festival is a part of our Christian memory and identity. Christians, like Jews, are children of these marked door posts, marked for safety in the midnight of chaos and crying. Just as the Jews remember at Passover the death of the first born Egyptians, we as Christians remember at Holy Communion God giving his first born, Jesus. The blood of the lamb was placed upon the door posts and the death angel would pass over their home. By the blood of Christ the door of salvation is opened to all people.

The aim of celebrating these marked door posts and hurried bread is that children may be recruited into this odd angle of vision. Thus the festival is intended to evoke probing questions from the children. The children will not know unless they wonder and unless they are told that this community holds an odd identity in the world - odd over against established power, odd because of the inscrutable protective attentiveness of God. The participants of these festivals and the tellers of these tales are indeed sojourners dreaming of a better land, filled with God's abundance. The engaged memory of pain evokes hope for a transformed world. The children of this community cannot afford to be protected from either the pain or the hope.

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