

Sometimes Our World is Falling Apart: From Past to Future
A Communion Meditation
The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
Rev. Jennifer Gingras
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Exodus 13:1-8

Let's do something just a little different today. I promise it won't hurt! In just a moment I'm going to ask you to find someone seated near you and share just two pieces of information with them. Tell them the very first phone number you remember having, and where that phone number was. Ready, set go!

Wow! How many of remembered the phone number you had as a kid? Amazing! Since that went so well I'm going to ask you to share one more thing with that very same person. You've got about 60 seconds to trade stories about a time when you got into trouble as a kid. Don't pretend like you don't have one to tell! For instance, I remember the day I was grounded for sneaking money out of my dad's change can. Go ahead and swap with your partner, I'll keep time.

Wow. Even more energy! Apparently some of you were quite naughty children. Now let me ask you – which told you more about the person you spoke to: the string of digits or the story? The story, of course!

When it comes to revealing who we really are, stories are always more powerful than facts. Facts can be easily forgotten, but a good story engages the heart and the imagination.

That's been true from our earliest days as human beings. Long before the written word, communities gathered around campfires and listened to the stories that defined them as a people. In fact, the stories contained in this book began as tales told from generation to generation. They continue to shape our identity as children of God; they tell us who we are.

And that's what today's scripture reading is all about – the power of story to shape our identity. For 400 years God's people, the Israelites, had been slaves in Egypt. Four hundred years! Can you imagine? Abused. Deprived. Forsaken... that was the story that defined them.

But then God wrote a new chapter. God sent a man named Moses to convince Pharaoh to set the people free. And while it took some considerable effort, Pharaoh finally granted their freedom. But God knew it would be

easier to get the people out of slavery than it would be to get the slavery out of the people.

Let me put that another way: while the people's circumstances were changed in a single night, it would take a whole lot longer to reset their identity, to reframe who they believed themselves to be – to change the narrative from abused, deprived and forsaken to blessed, beloved and free.

So, to help the people change, scripture tells us that God commanded the people to gather their families once each year for a sacred meal, and through that meal tell the story of how God, in great love for them, set them free from slavery.

For thousands of years our Jewish brothers and sisters have been living out those very words, celebrating what is called The Passover Feast. It is the story that shapes their minds and hearts, reminding them of who they once were and who they are now becoming.

That long ago time when Pharaoh set God's people free, it happened in a hurry, and the people needed to be ready. So God told them to make bread without yeast because they had no time to let their bread rise. And that's why they eat Matzoh today. But that's just part of the symbolism of Passover.

Participants eat bitter herbs dipped in salt water. The bitter herbs remind them of the bitterness of slavery, and the salt water reminds them of the tears their ancestors shed.

They drink 5 glasses of wine as a symbol of joy and celebration. And most importantly, one of the children at the table asks, "*Why is this night different from all other nights?*"

We too have a meal to share and a story to tell, one that shapes our identity and tells us who we are. It's a story told in bread and wine, of how God's love revealed in Jesus has set us free from guilt and shame.

Have you ever wondered why we come to this table over and over again? In 2016, we don't really "remember" Jesus Christ. We did not walk and talk with Jesus the way the disciples did. So why do we do it? Holy Communion is an experience of *being reminded* of our relationship as God's people, and Christ's promise of a new covenant.

Because we need to be reminded regularly of God's great love for us. We need to hear it over and over again because sometimes we struggle to

believe it. Instead, we are prone to believing the story that says we are the accumulation of our failures, which tell us we're not enough, not worthy of love, not really forgiven. That is the script that keeps us enslaved to guilt and shame.

But we worship a God who loves us and has set us free. That's the story that our communion meal tells. So, if you're here today and you're stuck in a storyline that has you enslaved, receive this bread and this cup and deeply hear again once again the words that shape you, the story that defines who you really are... beloved... child of God... forgiven.

Last weekend we handed out bibles to our confirmands, and soon we will hand Bibles out to our third grade class. It's how we fulfill the promise we make in their baptism, a promise to place the scripture in their hands. But we also do it because we believe that this story matters.

And it's one worth telling our children, because the world is going to tell them something different. The narrative they will receive is that they are only worthy if their smile is brilliant enough, if their athletic performance is stellar enough, if their clothes are cool enough, if their grades will get them access to the best college available. And like the narratives that play in our head telling us that we're not good enough or smart enough or wealthy enough to be loved, it's just not true.

Communion is experiential remembering. We usually don't think too deeply about it – we gather, we touch and taste, we hear the words repeated time and time again. We look into each other's eyes and know that it's true – God's Holy Spirit is present in this place, in this moment as we experience the living, dying, and living of Jesus Christ, again and anew... from the past to the future.

No wonder this is a story that we've passed down, from that very first meal in the Upper Room. Here is the ritual that reminds us we are a part of what God's is doing in the world, and we are invited once more to truly live into the ongoing life of Christ, again and anew, from the past to the future.

Today we reclaim the joy of remembering what our God has done, is doing, and will do to bring each and every one of us out of our individual bondage. There's a banquet of praise and a feast of love to share on this World Communion Sunday... as all over the globe, the body of Christ that lives and moves and has its being in the very heart of God comes together in celebration. Thanks be to God! Amen.