

Sermon: Rev Susanna Pain
7 September 2008

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

READINGS

Exodus 12: 1-14
Romans 13: 1-10
Matthew 18: 10-20

I honour Colleen O'Reilly, retreat director. I have been inspired by some of her ideas in this sermon.

Hearing the story of the Passover ritual from Exodus – a foundational story for Jewish people – I reflect on memory and ritual. What are the stories we tell over and over again, that shape us and form us and speak of our identity?

In the children's story, [*Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*](#), (Omnibus Books, S.A., 1984) Mem Fox explores memory. In the story she draws on her own family history for her characters.

..... *read the story*.....

Memory. I am always deeply moved by this story.

Rabbi Adam Morris writes,

We learn a great deal about others from the stories they choose to tell about themselves. There is no shortage of stories that Jews tell about ourselves ... The place to begin may be in Exodus. The stories that most Jews, observant or not, sit down to tell with most regularity is the one we tell around the Passover table during the Seder. It is this story of redemption and promise, and its challenge toward continuing that work that sits at the heart of the Passover celebration. It is this story that in many ways captures the essence of Judaism.

Show me Your Precious Ones: The Importance of the Exodus Narrative
for the Hebrew People, p.22
Seasons of the Spirit™ Congregational Life Pentecost 2
September 7, 2008, p. 20

What stories capture the essence of who we are as Christians for you? What acts of worship, education, community and service help remind us of who we are?

At 8am week after week, we hear the two great commandments:

love God & love your neighbour as yourself.

At 8am we also recite the Creed. We tell the story of what we believe:

I believe ... Father
Son
Holy Spirit
Church

This is a creed, worked out centuries ago, trying to articulate what was true for Christians – to weed out heresy...

At 8 & 10:

We gather
We hear readings from Scripture
We reflect on those readings
We state what we believe
We pray
We confess those things that have got in the way of relationship with
God and others
We are forgiven – cleansed, put right again
We hear the story of the last supper and
We move forward empty handed to receive
Jesus body and blood
We are blessed
We go out ...
We also sing songs of praise and thanksgiving.

In our weekly ritual of Holy Communion the highlight of our service is the eucharist – the giving thanks and receiving. It is no accident that we gather around a meal. Other Christian communities have a different emphasis and perhaps tell other stories more frequently. But we gather around the table. We recall a painful memory.

‘On the night that he was betrayed’, we hear, and we are present on that night. We are there ... with all our enthusiasm, our misunderstanding, our frailties. We are there with Jesus, on the night that he was betrayed. We are his friends, his companions on the way, we are his betrayers. The last supper looks back and forwards. It is Passover – that meal when the Hebrew people are about to be freed from Egypt. And it is the last supper – when Jesus is about to be betrayed, to die, to rise again ... and Jesus washes his friends’ feet and bids them follow his example.

Jesus blesses bread and wine and says ‘take, eat, this is my body, this is my blood. Do this to remember me’.

This is carnal, revolting, shocking.
This story we tell week after week. It forms us – people of the meal.
People receiving God embodied in our very selves.
This story forms us – we re-member, re-connect.

What actions do we do that reveal who we are?
We take, we eat

We sing
We share the peace
We join hands
We give – money
 – time
 – ourselves – in service
We share food and drink
 and stories – we heard some of the stories of members of our
 community in lent, and we read them in the bulletin
We grow ...
We care for children
 the elderly
 the sick
 those in prison
 refugees
We lobby against injustice
We work for the common good ...

What stories do you tell, about yourself? Your family? Your faith?

What are your favourites?
 Jesus and the woman at the well?
 Jesus and Mary in the garden?
 Jesus and his mates at the beach?

You've probably heard Nikolai and my butterfly story, Japan ...

Something warm
Something sad
Something from long ago
Something that makes you laugh ...

It is important to know who we are and from where we have come, to be secure in our stories. Though our stories probably change slightly on each retelling, and as we grow the emphasis shifts ...

There is a group of 12 young people preparing for confirmation, preparing to confirm the vows that were made for them at baptism. They have been hearing stories of people of faith. They have looked at the creed. They have read Mark's story of Jesus life. They have considered how they might serve. They have prayed, and reflected on the Lord's prayer ... and they have shared food ... and asked questions.

Ritual and story

Shared memories are forming them. It will be interesting to hear what stories they tell of their faith at their confirmation.

At the Passover meal forms our Jewish neighbours, so the Last Supper forms us as we tell it each week. How would you tell the story?

Would you bring in all the senses? Smell, touch, taste, sight, sound, movement.

'On the night that he was betrayed Jesus shared food with his friends, his companions on the way.

He took bread ...
He took a cup of wine.'

All part of the Passover ritual – reclaimed
And we are back there
And we are here
And we look forward to the heavenly banquet.

We listen, we tell, we act ...

What does this say of the God we profess?

What does this say about us?