

Text: Exodus 12: 1-14  
Title: Liberation's Lamb  
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Roger Allen Nelson

William Young, the child of missionary parents, was raised in the hills of New Guinea. As he describes it, his relationship with his father was strained and he suffered great loss as a child and young adult. Eventually William Young married and while living in the Pacific Northwest, he wrote a novel as a way to help his six children understand God, love, the nature of the Trinity, and the problem of suffering. The book has a sort of garage-project feel.....

But, that book, "The Shack," has become a New York Times Bestseller and created quite a stir.

The story Young writes is painful. Briefly told:

Mack Phillip's daughter, Missy, is abducted during a family vacation and there is evidence that she may have been murdered in an abandoned shack deep in the Oregon wilderness. Four years later, in the midst of a great sadness, Mack receives a suspicious note, apparently from God, inviting him to the shack for a weekend.

Against his better judgment Mack goes to the shack and enters into some other reality where he meets God; and the bulk of the book is the conversations between Mack and the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And, by the way, God the Father bears a striking resemblance to Whoopie Goldberg.

Everything is different than what you might imagine, but there is great pain and great beauty, and wrestling with profound mystery, and at times the book is ponderous and laborious, and at times I couldn't put it down, and at times the writing is terrible, and at times it was deeply moving.....

But, I am reminded that he wrote it for his children. He was trying to write a book to communicate the heart of God ~ a sort of summary of the will and way and word of God. In some ways he was trying to get at the big story, or the big idea, or the big mystery of the Bible.

What would you write? If you were going to write a book for the people that you love, what would you say is the way and will and word of God? What is it all about?

At one point in "The Shack" Jesus says to Mack:

*Mack, I don't want to be the first among a list of values; I want to be at the center of everything. When I live in you, then together we can live through everything that happens to you. Rather than a pyramid, I want to be the center of a mobile, where everything in your life ~ your friends, family, occupation, thoughts, and*

*activities ~ is connected to me but moves with the wind, in and out and back and forth, in an incredible dance of being.*

That is a telling passage. For William Young the crowning culmination is a personal relationship with God. What it all comes down to is an intimate friendship with God. Oh, there is other stuff about reclaiming creation and healing hurt, but finally and fully what all of this is about is a personal relationship with God.

What would you write? If you were going to write a book for the people that you love what you would say is the way and will and word of God? What is it all about?

A personal relationship with God?

The soul saving security of a ticket to heaven?

The framework for a good and moral life?

A big sweeping story of creation being salvaged?

What would you write?

Bob Ekblad in “Reading the Bible with the Dammed” writes that where you read scripture from will shape and determine how you understand scripture. The story reads different when you are on the margins rather than when you’re in the middle. The oppressed read a different gospel than the oppressor.

Therefore, for example, Latin American and Black theologians, have helped us read the Bible not just from a position of power ~ but also from some sense of powerlessness. And from there, the core story, the heart of the matter, is liberation.

“Liberation theology” has helped us see the story of the exodus not just as part of biblical history that leads up to Jesus, not just an appetizer, not just as pre-game, not just as passing motif, but closer to the heart, closer to the main plot...

The way, the will, the work of God is liberation.

The story of Exodus is engaging. Briefly told:

God’s covenant people, those who he called out to be his own, aren’t thriving in a land of milk and honey, but they are a motley crew of slaves under the oppressive thumb of the Pharaoh.

God hears his people suffering, raises up Moses, and sends him to Pharaoh to proclaim, “Let my people go!” But, in a tug of war between Egyptian management and Israelite labor, Pharaoh bets that the workers will rise up against this ridiculous radical prophet who demands their release. So, he responds by demanding that the Israelites maintain their bricks-per-day output ~ only now without the provision straw. What follows is a battle of plagues and power and the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart....

The plague of blood,  
the plague of frogs,  
the plague of gnats,  
the plague of flies,  
the plague on livestock,  
the plague of boils,  
the plague of hail,  
the plague of locusts,  
the plague of darkness,  
and finally the plague of death to the first born...

*For those of us of certain vintage it is hard to recite those ten plagues without some memory of Yule Brynner and Charlton Heston.*

But, then suddenly, smack dab in the middle of this unfolding horror, is our text this morning. Wedged into the story of liberation are the instructions for how to remember and reenact the story. In the telling of the exodus ~ liturgical instruction comes before liberation.

Now, that may just have to do with how the book of Exodus comes into shape, or.....  
Or, it may have to do with the relationship between worship and memory and time and identity.

God instructs the marking of the door posts with the blood of the lamb not as a road map for him, but as a sign for his people.

*On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.*

Now, there is a remarkably dark side to this story of liberation. The children of Israel may have fled at night, safe under the blood of the lamb, but from the first born of the Pharaoh to the first born of the slave girl to the first born of the animals there is slaughter. There is a chilling shadow to this liberation story that I can't just brush aside.... But!

But, can we also proclaim ~ even from this ancient formative story ~ that the desire of God's heart, the work of God's hands, the way of God in this world is liberation!?

And God makes provision that that liberating act will be reenacted and remembered and retold....

And the boundaries of time and space will be blurry and his people will be identified and shaped by exodus from enslavement.

Dear friends, part of why we gather and read old stories and recite old psalms and remember old rituals, is that in telling, in the eating, in the breaking of bread and the sharing of wine we are formed and reformed as God's freed people. And, we tell our children that the heart of God is found in

    leading people in liberation,  
    leading people in exodus,  
    leading people out from whatever enslaves,  
    leading creation out of chains.

The way, the will, the work of God is liberation.

During September and then again in November we going to pick up this thread, this narrative of liberation. We're going to trace some this story from slavery to worship, from liberation to liturgy to law. And, we going to consider the contours of God's freeing way, will, and work.

And, maybe that is enough for this morning....

But, part of my story to my children would include the memory that on a particularly dark and shadowy morning in my life, I can't shake the image of Willie Beck with his big old black belly busting through his too small shirt standing up in church and telling the story of his battle with the bottle.

    He talked about being enslaved,  
    and he talked about the hard long journey out....  
    And the congregation murmured their encouragement,  
    and I saw my dad clench and pump his fists as if to say:

*May the liberating lamb be in you to empower you,  
    and in front of you to lead the way,  
    and beside you to encourage you.*

For, dear friends, I don't what you might be enslaved by,

    I don't know what chains keep you bound,  
    I don't know what longing cries in you heart,  
    I don't know what shack holds your pain.  
    I don't know about a personal relationship with God,

But, the will and the way and the work of God is liberation.

And he hears your cry.

And under the protection of the blood of the lamb, you are free and you are being freed.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.