

## **Worship: Sunday, September 29, 2013**

**Scripture Reading:** Exodus 12:31-36; 14:5-13

Then God summoned Moses and Aaron in the night,  
and said, 'Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites!  
Go, worship the Lord, as you said.  
Take your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone.  
And bring a blessing on me too!'

The Egyptians urged the people  
to hasten their departure from the land,  
for they said, 'We shall all be dead.'  
So the people took their dough before it was leavened,  
with their kneading-bowls wrapped up in their cloaks on their shoulders.

The Israelites had done as Moses told them;  
they had asked the Egyptians for jewellery of silver and gold, and for clothing,  
and the Lord had given the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians,  
so that they let them have what they asked.  
And so they plundered the Egyptians.

When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled,  
the minds of Pharaoh and his officials  
were changed towards the people,  
and they said, 'What have we done,  
letting Israel leave our service?'  
So he had his chariot made ready, and took his army with him;  
he took six hundred picked chariots  
and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.

The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt  
and he pursued the Israelites, who were going out boldly.  
The Egyptians pursued them,  
all Pharaoh's horses and chariots,  
his chariot drivers and his army;  
they overtook them camped by the sea,  
by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back,  
and there were the Egyptians advancing on them.

**continued-->**

In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord.  
They said to Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt  
that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?  
What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt?  
Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt,

"Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians"?  
For it would have been better for us  
to serve the Egyptians  
than to die in the wilderness.'

But Moses said to the people,  
'Do not be afraid, stand firm,  
and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today;  
for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again.

### **Sermon: "Walking in God's Land"**

#### **The Farmer**

Picture, if you will, a farmer.  
Imagine that it is before the crack of dawn  
and he is rising in the cold, damp morning  
to begin his work day.

After he cares for the animals  
and does his chores around the barnyard,  
the farmer goes out into his field to check on his crops.

He feels the warmth of the morning sun  
as it makes its way high into the clear sky.  
He is hit with the beauty  
of the colours of an Autumn day -  
the golds, oranges, yellows, reds, and browns.

On his body, he can feel the crisp, cool air.  
The smell of the earth,  
as it works to ripen the plants,  
hits his nose.

The farmer faithfully walks the land --  
checking the fields,  
measuring the height of the corn stalks  
or sampling an apple in the orchard  
or kneeling down to see how big the squash has grown.

He marvels at the work of his own hand,  
remembering when the tiny seeds  
were placed in the ground  
back in the Spring.  
The seeds have grown into wonderful produce  
that is ready to harvest  
and that will soon decorate the tables of many  
and nourish the bellies of all.

He knows that all of these things  
are all gifts of the land  
and that indeed the land itself is a gift.  
And that next year,  
it will yield its abundance once more.  
This is God's land and it is good.

### **Abram and Lot**

I want to tell you another story about a farmer -  
about a very ancient farmer.  
He may not have owned a tractor  
and he surely had never heard tell  
of practices like genetic modification  
but his story is not dissimilar  
to the modern day farmer.

His name was Abram...  
or, as we know him, Abraham.  
And Abraham had a brother named Lot.  
Abraham and Lot went everywhere together,  
because that's what families did back then.  
If Abraham went to Bethel, Lot went to.  
If Abraham went to Ai, Lot went to.

During this one time of great famine,  
Abraham picked up his household  
and moved to Egypt.  
You know what?  
Lot went to.  
When conditions improved,  
Abraham and Lot and the crew left Egypt  
and went back out into the world to find their own place.

Each brother had been greatly blessed  
and they each had a lot of stuff.  
Abraham had a ton of animals with him  
and he carried with him bags filled with gold and silver.  
Lot too had flocks and herds of animals  
and lots of tents to house all the people  
who looked after the livestock and the household.

They had so much stuff, in fact,  
that the land that they shared became overburdened;  
it could no longer support both of them living together.

A bit of a crisis situation began to emerge.  
The people in Abraham's household  
were feuding with the people in Lot's household.  
Likely the arguments centred around  
who got to use the resources.

Everything finally came to a head one day.  
The brothers knew that if they didn't make a change soon  
that they might end up killing each other.  
So, as sometimes happens,  
the brothers decided to go their separate ways.

Abraham told Lot that he could have first pick  
of which path to follow  
and of which land he wanted as his own.

Lot looked around and spied with his little eye  
a lovely stretch of land that was lush and fertile.  
He saw land that was beautiful  
and would take very little work  
for it to give him all he needed.

He saw a place that would provide for him quite nicely,  
where he could live a pleasant life.  
He saw an area that had already been well-established.  
And most of all, he saw a great opportunity for personal gain.

Lot, being a bit greedy,  
quickly claimed the best for himself  
and left the rest for his brother.  
He went on his way and settled in that land,  
just outside of the city of Sodom...  
perhaps not the best choice as we would see  
if we read the story  
about the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gommorah

that came later.  
But in any case, on this particular day,  
Lot was thrilled to gather up his belongings and his entourage  
and head down the riverbanks of the Jordan,  
on his merry way.

Abraham, on the other hand,  
was quite content to go down a different path.  
Perhaps he didn't even know quite where he was going.  
But when he got to the land of Canaan,  
he knew he had arrived.  
He could feel it in his bones that this was home.

No sooner did he start to unpack,  
when he felt God's presence,  
urging him to look around this great land.

God said,  
"Abraham, look all the way to the north and then to the south.  
Raise your eyes to the east and then to the west.  
Every inch of land that you see now belongs to you.  
It is a gift from me to you.  
The land will sustain you and your descendants too,  
until the end of time."

So, Abraham did as God had said  
and he walked through the length and breadth of the land  
and got to know it well.  
He entered into a relationship with the land.  
He claimed it for his own but he also remembered  
that this land was a gift from God;  
that the land was indeed God's land and not his own.  
He treasured it and cherished it  
and held it in trust for future generations.  
And because of his care and attention,  
it remained in place for the generations that followed,  
just as God had promised.

## Conclusion

Now, we have inherited the land.  
"The land of Canaan", so to speak, is ours.  
It is still a place of great abundance.  
It still provides us with all we need.  
It is still God's land.

The land still cries out to us to be cared for.  
Can we hear the cries?  
Will we answer those cries,  
like the farmer does and like Abraham did?  
Will we choose to be good stewards of the earth?

Let us go now and walk through God's land,  
not with a heavy foot but with a light step.  
If creation is indeed a gift,  
let us give it our deep respect and reverence.

## Extra Reading

The bob white quails are scarce in the land.  
Even as meadowlarks and bobolinks lose their homes,  
barn owls no longer swoop through the night sky.  
God sees a little sparrow fall.  
We must share this Earth with all of creation.  
We will walk lightly on the Earth.

Hickory nuts spill from their husks;  
puff balls burst from the earth;  
an abundance of elderberries tug blossom heads downward:  
a harvest of plenty for all God's creation.  
We must remember that the abundance is for sharing.  
We will walk lightly on the Earth.

Daffodils spread across an abandoned lot  
while wild flowers reclaim the roadside;  
persistent dandelions push through a sidewalk crack  
and dogtooth violets claim a woodlot floor.  
Fragile, created grace;  
gifts to treasure;  
proclamations of hope.  
The earth can bloom again.  
We will walk lightly on the Earth.

The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love;  
you have established the earth and it stands fast. Keep our steps steady. (from Psalm 119)

## Offering Prayer

O God,  
we remember the gifts of creation,  
a world abundantly blessed.  
We remember the life of Jesus,  
lived in joy and given in love.  
We live within your abundant grace  
and we respond with offerings of love this day. Amen.

## Prayers of the People

Holy One, Breath of Creation,  
this day may we walk lightly on your Earth.  
May we celebrate the fragile strength of your creation,  
which calls our hearts into awe and our souls into worship.  
We are honoured to be called co-creators,  
given the joy and responsibility of tending your garden.

Compassionate God, heartbeat of creation,  
this day may we seek justice for the meadowlark, the polar bear,  
the leopard frog, the painted turtle,  
the white ash and pine,  
the tall grass prairie, the permafrost layer of soil;  
for all the threatened species of this earth.  
Remind us that in their loss, we are diminished.  
May we be their voice;  
may we be their hope;  
may we be their true companion on this Earth.

We remember anyone today who is suffering.  
We hold close to our hearts the Evans and Clayton families  
who are grieving the loss of loved ones.  
We think of all those affected by last week's Kenya Westgate Mall Massacre  
and the early morning attack on a college dorm today in Nigeria.  
We think of those who feel turmoil in their own life  
whether because of poverty, illness or violence.

And now in a moment of refreshing silence  
we offer you the concerns that fill our minds.  
*Silence*

Creator God,  
be with us now and all days.  
Help us to find what we must do  
and who we must be.  
Make it so, as we pray in the way that Jesus' taught: