

March 2, 2021

Read Exodus 13

Key verse: Exodus 13:14

When in the future your child asks you, “What does this mean?” you shall answer, “By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery.”

Carrying the Faith

Do you remember the first time you went to church? I don't, but it was probably the day I was baptized. Having performed quite a few baptisms in my ten years of ministry I wish that I *could* remember it. I wish that I had some recollection of the pride my parents must have felt, of the pastor dabbing my head with holy water and declaring “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,” of the smiles on the faces of all the people who came to witness the event.

Had I been a little older at my baptism I might have asked, “What does this mean?” but since my parents enrolled me in Sunday school I would have plenty of opportunity to ask that question and many others as my Christian journey progressed. And I would have plenty of questions regarding this wonderful place called church: Why do I have to be quiet in church? Why do those kids light the candles on the altar? Why does everyone respond together when the pastor says something? Why do we stand, sit, or kneel at certain times? Why are the lights dimmed when the pastor starts giving us that long talk? (that was when my mother popped me a Lifesaver – cherry was my favorite).

Social scientists have different theories about the “function” of rituals, but in religion rituals point to God. Rituals are reminders that God has acted in miraculous ways in history. And while rituals point to past events, they also open our minds to the possibility that God is acting in the present and in our presence. Lent, a time of prayer and fasting, reminds us of the courageous and sacrificial love of God played out in the suffering and death of his Son Jesus. Lent continues for forty days, the same amount of time that Jesus spent in the Wilderness where he was tempted by Satan. And so part of the intension of the ritual of Lent is for us to face those temptations and overcome them, as Jesus did. In this way we not only commemorate Jesus Christ; we *imitate* Jesus Christ, who told us, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). May our engagement in this wonderful ritual of Lent not only remind us of God's amazing love but prompt us to live lives that illuminate that love to others.

Prayer: God of mystery, you have shown us your love and power throughout history. Help us actively remind ourselves of your wonderful acts of salvation, to tell your story to our children, and to live lives that convey that love to all people. Amen.