

Good Friday 2019

Acknowledgments to Uniting Church Merredin, WA, Australia

Quote:

Best-selling American author, Bruce Feiler says: “There’s a reason the Exodus story has inspired so many (people). It’s a **narrative of hope**”.

The Old Exodus

Many millennia ago (3457 years), the ancient Israelites responded to the call of God through the prophet Moses and **escaped their overlords in Egypt** – and we know it as the **Exodus**.

This became, for ancient Hebrew people, the great event that marked their rescue by the God of Abraham, Jacob and Isaac. Not only were they released from years of cruel oppression...

- It was the beginning of a **new relationship** with the God of old – they experienced the faithful covenant love of God;
- For the first time, they were called God’s “first-born”, establishing for them a **new identity**, and
- And they were freed to a new destiny, a **new hope** – to settle in a land of great blessing.



A lasting commemoration of these event is recorded in the Old Testament - instructions were given on how to **regularly remember** this moment in history – and to recognise how urgent the situation had been for their forebears.

Exodus 10:17 Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come.

Exodus 12:11 This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord’s Passover.

The grace and love of God in that Exodus offered to them **release and protection** when they were helpless, oppressed and unable to save themselves.

That ceremony of remembrance around the dinner table in every family home on the same night each year was to be called the **Passover** Supper, or Pesach, in **the great festival of unleavened bread**.

The New Exodus

In the light of Jesus' life, the writers of the New Testament saw something of a "new exodus" in his mission and message. For example,

- The Gospel writers noted the significant timing of Jesus' choice to enter Jerusalem when it coincided with the great festival of Unleavened Bread in Jerusalem; when **Passover celebrations took place** with the greatest numbers of people in that ancient city.
- The Apostle Paul refers to Jesus' death on the cross in 1 Corinthians 5, saying "Christ, **our Passover**, has been sacrificed for us..." (1 Corinthians 5:7).
- The Gospel writers and Paul display a sense of fascination with how Jesus chose to celebrate a **traditional Passover meal** with his disciples the night before he died - within that meal he pointed to a **new hope** for the world in which he was the **central figure** – and called them **commemorate him** perpetually in the future.



Jesus even declared (as recorded in 3 of the Gospels) that he looked forward to drinking from the fruit of the vine again after he ushered in the new reign and realm of God (e.g. Matthew 26:29).

The Passover that looked back on the Exodus **foreshadowed a greater hope, a wider love**, a more expansive **search and rescue operation to free humanity from its slavery to sin and self** and set it on course for a **new identity**.

Example of God's love

Last week's feature story on the ABC show Four Corners caught my attention when preparing for this Good Friday sermon.

Karen Nettleton is the grandmother of the Sharrouf children – Australian kids caught up in the terror of Isis and now stranded without parents in a sprawling Syrian refugee camp.



Karen Nettleton may seem an unlikely candidate in many ways, but her love for her grandchildren reminds me of God's love for humanity.

Devastated by the path her daughter and son-in-law took in life, she heard by text message and phone the **desperate cries of their orphan children** from among the 70,000 people trapped in the Al-Hawl refugee camp.

After the Australian Government declared itself unable to help her, Karen travelled at her own cost and at great risk several times to Turkey and Iraq to gain access. After many delays, many setbacks, road blocks and challenges; in great anguish due to the fearful and painful cries of her dead daughter's children, Karen **persevered and persevered**.

She was not content to simply know where they were, she was determined to rescue those powerless children.

Just 3 weeks ago she walked across the border into Syria. With no specific idea where to look, Karen **wandered the camp shouting out loud** the names of the Sharrouf children over and over again. Against all probabilities her loud call reached the ears of the Sharrouf children and they were re-united in the camp.

This extraordinary story in **our time**, reminds me of the manner in which the Bible describes the plight of the ancient Israelites in exile. In the Book of Exodus (2:23) we read:

"During that long period, the King of their overlords died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and **cried out**, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God."

Again, in chapter 3 (vss. 9,10) we read an account of how God spoke to Moses, saying:

“And now **the cry of the Israelites has reached me**, and I have seen the way they have been oppressed. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people... out...”

The story of Jesus invites us in many ways to **connect the dots** between the saving love and grace of God in that **first exodus** long ago, and the **greater new exodus**¹ offered to all the world through faith in the one God sent to find us and save all people from sin and self.

In Christ, God offers us a **new freedom** from a **greater exile**: our enslavement to sin and self.

In Christ, God offers us a **new relationship** of love and peace.

In Christ, God offers us a way be a **new humanity** – a people of peace and blessing for the world.

Gu-d Friday

Today is **Good Friday**. Many have wondered why today is called Good Friday. I once looked it up in a Christian reference book and it said that the word “Good” was derived from old Anglo-Saxon word “Gu-d” meaning “solemn or holy”.



Originally, it is said, the meaning of that Anglo-Saxon word “Gu-d” was in fact used to refer to a pie-base among bakers, to describe slices of the pie that “fitted together, or belonged together”.

There’s a nice, naïve illustration to take away this Gu-d Friday – the cross of Christ offers humans a new way to fit together; to belong together, by the grace of God.

Some view this day as a sad and sombre day. The mood in some churches is pretty heavy, or at least subdued. Yet it is, in fact, **a day of celebration**.

The **new exodus** too, is a **narrative of hope**.

Good Friday is perhaps the greatest day for **rejoicing**, for the Cross is a sign of God’s relentless love that **searches out every captive** self-serving heart.

¹ That’s how many scholars and commentators label Jesus’ mission as the “new exodus” (see too how Matthew 17:3 alludes to the significance of Jesus in association with Moses).

Dr. Eugene H. Peterson writes in his book, *The Invitation* (2008), “The mission of Christ followers is to proclaim the liberating message of the good news... The challenge of a decision now confronts us. What will we do? How will we **fit into this story? Will we be a part** of God’s mission of re-creation – of restoring the world around us – and making the world (including ourselves) new?”

God’s love seeks to set you and me free to love, free to belong, and free to be part of a new people of peace, so we may live life to the full.