

A person wearing a white robe and a brown fringed shawl is walking on a sandy, desert-like ground. The background is a hazy, sunlit landscape with some distant hills or mountains. The overall tone is warm and spiritual.

Exodus

Journeying with Jesus to new life and freedom.

**Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth.
5 studies for small groups**

Exodus

Journeying with Jesus to new life and freedom.

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Introduction

Between New Year and Easter 2016 we have been working through a sermon series in our Sunday morning services called, “Journeying to Jerusalem.” In this series we are following the story of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke as he makes his way towards Jerusalem and the cross. In the first 9 chapters of Luke’s Gospel, known as ‘the Galilean Narrative’, we see an episodic account of Jesus’ ministry primarily orientated around establishing Jesus’ Messianic identity. With Luke 9:51 and the declaration that “as the time approached for (Jesus) to be taken to heaven, he resolutely set out for Jerusalem,’ we see the start of what theologians either call ‘The Travel Narrative’ or ‘The Journey Narrative.’ This is a much less episodic and more linear account of Jesus’ ministry, with each step bringing him closer to the events of Holy Week.

There are two major themes to the ‘Journey’ section of Luke’s Gospel. The first theme is the coming of salvation in all of its fullness to all people. Luke asks the question, what does it mean to be people who live in the shadow of the cross? What does salvation look like? How do we enter into it and what do our lives look like once we are saved?

The second theme is one of the division caused by Jesus’ ministry. This division is the fulfilment of the prophecy spoken over the baby Jesus in Luke 2:34, and we see it in the increasing hostility of the Jewish religious elite towards Jesus, and even in the divisions and obduracy of the disciples. Called to share in his ministry, the disciples show themselves to be surprisingly obtuse regarding the nature of Jesus’ divine mission, and we even see them resistant to what Jesus is about. Judas will betray the Lord, Simon Peter will deny him and the other disciples will abandon him. In the run-up to the events of Holy Week, Martha rebukes the Lord over his lack of care about the ‘idleness’ of Mary (10:40), some people in the crowds accuse him of being in cahoots with Beelzebul (11:15) and eventually the crowds will call for his crucifixion (23:21).

Paradoxically, during this period Jesus seeks out the company of Pharisees and religious leaders and visits them in their homes for meals – it is almost as if he is trying to sort out those who are not with him but against him (Luke 11:23). Throughout the journey narratives we read again and again that the crowds are increasing and the people are amazed at his words and power... but still some turn against him.

It is as if Luke is wanting to say to the early church, “Remember, as we journey with Jesus some will join us but others will be violently opposed to

us!” In our modern world we also need to understand that if we follow Jesus, there will be opposition, criticism, ridicule and even persecution.

In this Bible study series, I want us to focus on the theme of journeying, but from a different angle. For the 5 weeks of Lent we will ask ourselves what it means to be a people who journey with Jesus, but look at it through the lens of the Exodus. Luke very deliberately chooses this ideas of travel and journeying because it was such an important motif in the story of the Jewish people. The salvation of Israel was achieved by a journey out of slavery, and each year the Jews would remember this journey in the Passover celebrations. Jesus very deliberately identifies his journey through death into the new life of the resurrection with the story of the Exodus, and uses the imagery of the Passover meal to remind us of his death in the communion meal. Jesus is identified as the Passover lamb of God for the whole world, and through baptism we are invited to pass through water from on old life of slavery to a new life of freedom in Christ. Many Christians would even go as far as to say that the events of the Exodus are a foreshadowing of Jesus and his ministry to set the whole earth free from slavery.

The word ‘Exodus’ is a Greek word (ἔξοδος) which is made up of two parts: the ‘Ex’ part means ‘out’ while “hodos” means to journey or travel. Thus, ‘Exodus’ means to travel or journey out of something. As we journey away from our old life, and into the new life which Jesus calls us to, let us use this Lent to examine the themes of the Exodus story together and see what God wants to say for us in our life together as a community today.

Roger Grafton
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Study 1: Slavery and Oppression

Background

Most of us know the story of how the Israelites came to be in Egypt. At the end of the Book of Genesis, Jacob's family have travelled to Egypt at the invitation of one of Jacob's sons, Joseph. Joseph himself had arrived in the land after being sold into slavery by his brothers, but had risen to prominence and found himself in a position to rescue his beleaguered family. However, as time went on, Jacob's family had grown into a nation and as they became more numerous they attracted the suspicion and fear of the Egyptians. By the time the Book of Exodus opens, the whole nation has been enslaved and are crying out to God for help.

There is much in this story that resonates with current news headlines as we read or hear about Syria and the current refugee crisis. In Exodus we find people enslaved, we read of genocide and ethnic cleansing, and towards the end of our studies Israel is a multitude of people fleeing oppression and making a dangerous journey through the sea on their way to a new, promised land. There is nothing new under the sun!

Read Exodus 1:1-22

Verse 8 tells us that people had forgotten the story of Joseph and how he had rescued them during a time of famine. As a result, the Israelites were made to suffer. Much of Old Testament Law is about remembering what God has done for us and in Communion we are called to remember what Jesus has done for us. Remembering is important!

- ✘ How good is your memory about the things God has done for you in the past? When troubles come along, how easily do we forget God's blessings and provision in the past?
- ✘ Are you a person who tends to concentrate more on current anxiety and worries than remember how God has been there in times of difficulty in the past?
- ✘ List the words in the passage that speak of Israel's life being blessed, and those and that speak of Israel's life being oppressed.

God's great promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3 was this:

“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”

- ✘ What parts of these promises have been or are being fulfilled in Exodus 1:1-22? What parts of these promises are under threat in the passage?
- ✘ Things don't look too good for Israel. How do we react when life does not look good or when God's promises seem under threat in our lives?
- ✘ What options do you think Israel had to escape the oppression they were under? How could they have helped themselves?
- ✘ The beginning of salvation is always realising how totally dependent on God we are. The reason we need rescuing is because we are helpless to rescue ourselves! Do you remember the first time you realised your need for a saviour? Can you share with your group how this came about? What was your response?

Read Luke 18:9-17

- ✘ Jesus tells a story of 2 men – one who thinks he is righteous and one who knows he is not. How much of the tax collector is there in most Christians, and how much of the Pharisee? Do we sometimes think of ourselves as more righteous than other people?

John Calvin, who lived in France in the 1500's, taught a system on Biblical interpretation which today we call 'Calvinism.' The main 5 points of his theology are remembered by the acronym TULIP:

Total Depravity (nothing we do can save us from our sin)

Unconditional Election (God saved us because of his love, not on our merits)

Limited Atonement (Jesus died only for 'the elect.' Some people will not be saved)

Irresistible Grace (when God calls us, we cannot resist.)

Perseverance of the Saints (“Once Saved Always Saved.”)

The beginning of salvation is the acknowledgement of our total depravity and need of God, much like the tax collector in Luke 18. The beginnings of

Israel's salvation in Egypt was when they started to cry out to God for mercy.

- ✠ How do we hold together the tension of knowing we are saved and called 'the children of God' with the knowledge that we are sinners who are totally dependent on God's mercy?
- ✠ Do you 'feel' more "saved" or "sinner"? is there a tension between the two? Can you feel both at the same time?

2. Born and Saved

I love the story of how Jonah gets swallowed by a big fish! Many people see this as a punishment for his disobedience in running away from the call of God, but in fact the fish was sent to save Jonah. If the fish or whale had not been in the right place at the right time, Jonah would have drowned, but God provided it to save him and bring him safely to the beach. It may not have been pleasant, but it was effective. What I really love about that story is the way God must have been working well before Jonah needed rescuing to get the fish into the right place. As Jonah was setting out on his journey, God was already moving the fish into the right place for the moment Jonah was thrown overboard.

Before we realise we need rescuing, and before we call out to God for help, he has already manoeuvred everything into place to help us. This is true for us today, but it was also true of the people of Israel. We read in Exodus 2: 23 and 24 that the people cried out to God for help, and God heard their groaning and remembered his covenant with Israel. However, by that point in the story, he had already prepared a saviour for them in the person of Moses, and was already manoeuvring the pieces into place for their salvation...

Read Exodus 1:15 – 2:10

- ✘ What jumps off the page at you in this passage?
- ✘ List the people in the story, what they did to preserve Moses' life and what they risked in doing so. How much of a 'team effort' was saving Moses' life? We often think of Moses as the hero of the Exodus, but who else should we be grateful to?

This story deliberately picks up on stories from Israel's past (Genesis) and future (Exodus). What links can you find between the following stories:

- a. Moses being placed in a basket (the same word is used in Genesis to describe the "Ark") and the story of Noah; and
 - b. The actions of Pharaoh's daughter in saving Moses, and the story of God saving Israel in the Exodus.
- ✘ What links do you find between the story of the Exodus and the story of our salvation through Jesus?

- ✘ This passage is almost completely about women! At the beginning of Exodus it is women who defy and subvert the murderous purposes of Pharaoh and instead serve the life-giving purposes of God. Often in church history, we have airbrushed women out of the story. How have women in your life been both a source and example of God's gift of life?
- ✘ In this story we see some people who we would expect to help the Israelites (Israelite midwives), and other who ought to be enemies (Pharaoh's daughter). Can you think of other unlikely people God uses in the scriptures to achieve his purposes?
- ✘ Has God ever used unlikely people in your own life to guide you, help you, rebuke you or direct you at key moments?

There is a peculiar series of events in the story of Moses. The persecution of the Israelites (which was a bad thing) led to the bravery of the midwives (which was a good thing!). In turn this led to the mass slaughter of the innocents in the Nile (bad thing), but meant that Moses was found by Pharaoh's daughter and saved (good thing). Whilst Moses wasn't brought up in his own family and amongst his own people (bad thing), it did mean that he was brought up in the royal palace – this would be invaluable later on when he came to negotiate with the Pharaoh (undoubtedly a good thing!)

This reminds us of the word of Joseph in Genesis 50:20. "What you intended for harm, God intended for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." There is an echo of this in Romans 8:28 where Paul writes, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

The journey towards the cross has an awful inevitability about it, and we know that the terrors of the crucifixion await Jesus in Jerusalem, yet God uses the evil of the cross to work the miracle of salvation.

- ✘ Can you look back on your life and see instances where you were suffering, anxious or confused, and yet you can now see how God was using that bad situation to work good? Share your stories with your group.

3. Encounter with God

In 2008 I was going to spend 3 months in Afghanistan with the army. I did all the training and preparation and was all ready to go. At that time my children were very young, and obviously were a little anxious about me being away. I remember one particular conversation with my youngest son where he was asking me about the dangers of the trip. I assured him that as a Padre (chaplain) in a field hospital, I was about as safe as I could be, but he was still a little concerned.

“Will you get a medal?” he asked.

“Actually, yes I will!” I replied.

“Will you let me look at it?” the 8-year-old Patrick asked?

“I tell you what,” I said. “You can have the medal to keep yourself if you want, as long as I can borrow it sometimes when I need to wear it.”

“Promise?” he asked.

“I promise,” I answered.

Then, at the last minute, my part in the operation was cancelled and instead of doing a whole tour overseas, I just made odd visits – and I had to break my promise! Of course, I might still get a chance to fulfil my promise to Patrick at some point in the future, but for the time being it goes unfulfilled. Sometimes promises take a long time to be kept, but with God we can be confident that his promises are sure. As fathers, we might let our children down, but our heavenly Father never does.

Read Exodus 3:1-22. It is quite a long passage, so you might want to divide it between the group.

- ✘ List the words the passage uses to describe God’s activity. Who initiates the activity in this story and who does all the ‘work’?
- ✘ In what ways is Israel’s salvation a partnership between God and Moses?
- ✘ In what way is God’s plan for the salvation of Penarth a partnership between us and God?

✘ Verse 7 tells us that God had seen, heard and been concerned for his people. However, as yet it does not seem (at least to the people who were suffering) that he had actually done much about it. The people have been suffering in slavery for 80 years at this point in the story.

- ✘ What can we learn from this passage when it seems God is not answering our prayers or we are suffering?

- ✠ God's great promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3 was this: "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." As Abraham obeys God and arrives in Canaan, God appears to Abraham and promises, "To your offspring I will give this land" (Genesis 12:7). What evidence of these promises being fulfilled can be found in the passage?

- ✠ What part do God's promises play in sustaining our faith and hope when life is oppressive?

- ✠ How easy is it believe in God's promises in difficult times and how does this affect hope?

- ✠ How will this passage change the way we face circumstances where life is difficult?

- ✠ Are there things your group could pray for right now about areas in your life where you need help? Ask them to pray that you might be able to persevere in this time between saying the prayers and God answering them.

4. “Let my people go!”

A few weeks ago I attended a concert at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama. It was an evening of British music ranging from the 1920's to recent times, and was hosted by Nicholas Parsons. He is now quite an elderly gentleman, but he is still very alert and had some wonderful stories to tell about show business going back over 80 years. One story he told was about when he was a young man appearing in his first West End show. On an afternoon off he took the opportunity to go and watch a play in the theatre next door, and was sat next to another man. Being young and full of himself, he was trying to impress the man next to him and said, “I’m an actor, you know. I’m appearing at the theatre next door.”

“Really?” replied the stranger.

“Yes, really. You should come and see what we are doing,” said Parsons.

“Oh, I’ll see if I can make some time,” the man said.

“You definitely should. Are you in the theatrical business?”

“Sort of,” replied the man. “My name is Ivor Novello and I do a bit of composing!”

Nicholas Parsons said that he wished the ground had opened up and swallowed him. Not recognising someone can be very embarrassing!

Read Exodus 5:1-21

- ✘ In verse 2, Pharaoh twice states his reason for refusing to let Israel go: he does not know the Lord. However, we read in verse 21 that the Israelite foremen, who presumably did know God, are also cross with Moses. Is it possible to know God and not obey him? Is it possible not to know God and still obey him?
- ✘ What do you think God thinks or feels about people who call themselves Christians who do bad things? What do you think he feels or thinks about non-Christians who do good things? When a Muslim shows mercy or kindness, or a Hindu helps a stranger in distress, what do you think God might have to say?
- ✘ What do the conversation between the Israelite overseers and Pharaoh, and the conversation between the overseers and Moses and Aaron, reveal about what the Israelites want? Are the things the overseers want the things that God wants for them?
- ✘ What does this passage teach us about ourselves and our desires, and God and his desires?

- ✠ Have there been times when you have wanted things which maybe God did not want for you? How did it turn out? Are there things right now which you would like, which maybe God doesn't want for you? If God is a loving Father, why does he not give you what you want?
- ✠ Throughout the story of the Exodus we see increasing levels of suffering for the Israelites: slavery, infanticide, increased workloads and harsh treatment. It is a story that goes on over 80 years. Why doesn't God act sooner? Why does he allow all these years of suffering?
- ✠ When we look at the suffering of refugees in Syria today, or the persecution of the Christian Church in the middle east, where is God? Why doesn't he do something? How are we to understand suffering?
- ✠ Often Christians have given simple, quick or glib answers to the problems of suffering. How does this hinder our Gospel mission when we talk to unbelievers? What should we say to people of no faith or other faiths in the face of suffering?

5. Passover

This week we jump forward in the story to the night of the Passover. After all the suffering, plagues, trials and troubles of the first 12 chapters of Exodus, God makes the decisive move to save his people. This most important of nights begins with the Passover.

Over the next week or so we will be sharing supper together as a church and remembering the Exodus story. Each year we come together for this purpose: we light candles, say prayers, eat lamb, break bread and pour and drink wine. As we remember the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, we also remember how Jesus met together with his disciples on the night before he died. They lit candles, said prayers, ate lamb, broke bread and drank wine as they retold the story of the Jewish people. The amazing truth was that as the disciples looked back to the Exodus, they also looked forward to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 5:7 that Christ is our Passover lamb. As the people of Israel were passed over by the angel of death, and travelled from slavery into freedom, so through Christ we too pass from slavery to sin to freedom in Christ, and death passes us by. His death, made once for all upon the cross, means life for us! Thanks be to God!

Read Exodus 12:1-13 and 21-30

- ✘ Make a list of all the complex preparations the Israelites were to make. Why did God insist on such intricate observation of the Passover? Was it really all necessary?
- ✘ In verse 24 Moses says these instructions are an 'everlasting ordinance.' Why? What is the link between ceremony or ritual and remembrance?
- ✘ Why do you think God instructed the Israelites to mark their door frames with blood, and to do that each year? Why was it important?
- ✘ What do you make of the instructions to burn what was not eaten, to have cloaks tucked into belts, sandals on feet, and staff in hand, and to eat in a hurry?
- ✘ What traditions do we have – as a community of faith and as a nation – that enable us to remember the past? What everlasting ordinances do we keep, and what is their link to the Passover?
- ✘ What traditions do you have as a family around Easter (or Christmas maybe) which you really enjoy? How did those traditions start? How do

you feel when the tradition is not followed?

- ✘ There are two dangers that churches can fall into: one is clinging to dead tradition and the other is discarding important heritage! What traditions do you value in our church life? What would you like brought back? What would you like to see ended?
- ✘ How do these traditions help us to focus on Jesus or distract us from it?
- ✘ How do they help or hinder us in our mission?

Holy Week Services at Tabernacle 2016

Palm Sunday - 20th March

10.30am Palm Sunday Service with Communion
6.00pm Palm Sunday Evening Worship

Maundy Thursday - 24th March

7.30pm Passover Celebration (tickets required)

Good Friday - 25th March

11.15am Reflections on the Cross
8.00pm Tenebrae Service

Easter Saturday - 26th March

8.00pm Service of Light and Easter Vigil

Easter Day - 27th March

10.30am Easter Sunday Family Celebration
6.00pm Easter Sunday Evening Worship

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