

"FAST FOOD - TO GO"

Reading: Psalm 149, Matthew 18:15-20, Romans 13:8-14, Exodus 12:1-14
Preached at First Presbyterian Church, Baldwin, NY, on September 4th 2011

"Is that for here, or is it to go?" asked the girl at McWendyKing (or some such fast food place). "To Go!" I replied, because I was on the go. A hundred things to do and a lot of folk to see. Got to keep moving. I would have gone around to the drive-thru but some days I just can't stand talking into that little loudspeaker. I can never understand what the assistants saying on the other end.

And I don't understand why you need to do that anyway. Couldn't you just drive up to the window where you pay and give your order to the human being there instead of to the little box? Does it really save time? Usually there's only about two or three cars distance to the window anyway! Seems less than efficient, particularly when, on some occasions I come away with exactly what I hadn't asked for.

But, why worry? It's not as if the food you are about to throw down yourself has any gastronomic integrity. It's made as cheaply as possible, put together as quickly as do-able, and often consumed at a speed that deserves a mention in the Guinness Book of Records. FAST FOOD. – LET'S GO!

Meanwhile, back in Egypt, Moses has been having a hard time convincing Pharaoh to "Let my people go". Although the land has been hit by a series of plagues, Pharaoh keeps changing his mind. First they can go, then they have to stay, then they can go, then they can stay. It's becoming kind of repetitive.

But not for much longer. The Israelites days in Egypt are numbered. The numbers have nearly run out. There is to be one, final, decisive action on the part of God, that will finally convince the Pharaoh that it would be a deadly thing to keep the Israelites there any longer.

The final affliction is a plague of death. At the time Moses was born, the Pharaoh was murdering every first-born Hebrew Child, ordering them to be killed at birth or thrown into the river to drown. It was a miracle that Moses had escaped with his life, let alone grown up to be an ex-prince of Egypt who now led Israel.

They do say that what goes around, comes around. That certainly seemed to be the case in Egypt. The nature of the final plague is that the angel of death will take down every firstborn in the land, both humans and animals.

The only exception is to be those households whose doorposts are covered by the blood of a sacrificial lamb, a lamb that has to be prepared and consumed in exactly the way Moses tells them. This would be a sign for all the faithful that God had set them free. It would mark the beginning of a new era in the nations life and a new stage in Israel's history. For them history would begin again. The month that they left Egypt would be considered forever more as the first month of a New Year.

Knowing that the angel of death was approaching, I'm sure that, if they were able back then, there would have been those amongst the Hebrews who would have ordered their sacrificial lamb from the Egyptian equivalent of McWendyKings.

"I'll have seven lambs, (make that 8, better get one for the dog in case he turns out to have been the first born).. and oh.. an extra order of blood on the side, please". "Is that for here or to go?" To Go! Fast food to go!" (*Of course being in Egypt maybe they could also have said, "I'll have a crocodile sandwich.. oh.. and make it snappy":*) Hmm.

Like my jokes it really was no laughing matter, in any way. The events that were about to take place were horrific. There really hadn't been anything to rejoice about for a long, long time in Egypt for the Hebrews. Were they really, after all this time, after all that had been taking place, were they really free to go?

The answer, right at that moment, was an extremely hesitant and cautious "yes". They wouldn't actually be free from Pharaoh until after they had passed through the Red Sea. They had hard times in front of them and most, including Moses, would not live to enter the Promised Land.

What they are about to do is something that would be, for all time, a symbol of faith. Something that turned that hesitant "yes" into a declaration of faith. They are given the Passover Meal. Exodus 12:14 *"This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance"*.

Passover was a meal to go. Remember Moses instructions? Exodus 12:11 *"This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the Passover of the LORD."*

Passover was something to prepare them for the journey. Something that would etch into their minds God's saving power. A celebration that would always remind them of their deliverance from slavery and misery.

Deliverance came at a price. They would eat, amongst other things, bitter herbs and unleavened bread. There would be great mourning all around them, on the part of those who chose not to heed Moses instructions. The deep irony of the situation was that their deliverance to life would only come through death, the death of unblemished lambs and innocent firstborns.

There are startling parallels between the celebration of Passover and our own Christian celebration of Holy Communion, a fact that both the Gospel authors and the writers of the N/T letters are keen to point out.

The first time as a boy that Jesus goes to Jerusalem it is for the family to celebrate Passover (Luke 2:41). It is at the Passover meal Jesus takes the bread and cup (which represent the broken body and shed blood of God's only begotten Son) and shares them with His disciples. To a Corinthian Church beset with division and troubles Paul writes *"Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be ... new For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. (1 Corinthians 5:7).*

Communion is a time we draw together to recall the covenant promises God makes to us in Christ. A time to strengthen ourselves for our spiritual journey. A faith-meal that looks to a deliverance yet to come. A time to rejoice that the blood of Jesus, Lamb of God, forgives us, redeems us and sets us free from the fear of death

Passover was a meal that was eaten – ready to go. *However Passover was not fast food.* Passover was not something prepared hastily or carelessly or least expensively put together. It took time. It required understanding. It was costly.

Preparation for the meal began four days prior to cooking, when a lamb (from either a sheep or a goat) was chosen. The lamb was to be shared with those who were not able to afford a lamb of their own. Neighbors were to come together. Nobody was to be excluded.

The lamb had to be a yearling without blemish. In other words it was prime stock. Not the left over or the weakling. In economic terms it was the costliest. It had to be kept until at twilight there was a community act of slaughter. It was then that the blood had to be smeared on the doors of the houses where the lamb was to be eaten.

That same night it was to be eaten in equal portions by all those who came to supper. It was to be slow cooked over the fire.. not boiled or eaten raw. The whole lamb was involved... the inward parts, the head, the legs.. all had to be roasted. Anything that became left over had to be burnt up. Only then... after all of that... were they ready to go.

We live in a fast food world. People want answers, even to their religious questions, in quick, digestible bytes. Instant Spirituality. Sign up here today and tomorrow it will be yours! The problem is that 'Fast-Food' is sometimes called 'Junk Food'. In other words it doesn't sustain, it doesn't really nourish, it doesn't meet the dietary needs, it just makes the hunger go away for a while.

I can offer you no Fast Food this morning. But I can invite you to come to a table laid with bread and wine, and prayerfully and whole-heartedly seek for God's presence to be Your inspiration and guide in the coming days. I can direct you to Jesus, our Passover Lamb, to feed your deepest needs.

Paul, when speaking of communion, talks of preparing yourself to receive the bread and wine. Now is the time to do that. To reflect on where our lives are and what these elements represent. A God who wants to travel with us, but in order to do so requires that we commit our lives into His care. A Savior who died that no barrier may prevent us from living in God's Presence. A Holy Spirit that seeks to inspire us every step of the journey.

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