

When I came to our Church, one of the boxes you were seeking in a Pastor, was training in Family Systems because in Families it does not matter about who is right. Family Systems is awareness of how difficult it is to imagine a future different from all we have done in the past. We get ourselves stuck in patterns of behavior, eventually coming to believe that past performance is not only a predictor of our future, but a guarantee. Reviewing generations of our family's behavior, if ancestors went to college there is an assumption you will also. If they began employment at an early age, we did too. If Military service was part of your family, there is more than an acceptance, an expectation of this as normative. Changing expectations is not simply trying something different, it is charting a journey promised to fall off the edge of the world, but still change happens. In my own family, I have done genealogy back to the 700s, and there had never been a divorce, until my mother died and our father remarried, within this next 30 years all of my brothers has been divorced, as if there was now a different expectation of behavior that expected 2nd and 3rd marriage. It is as if the older we become, the less open the future seems, and the more ominous the past looms over us.

The key to all this is not genetics, it is not environment, it is not even predetermination, predestination, or learned behavior, the key is STORY. Because the past is not simply passed, our pasts are INTERPRETED STORIES. Our pasts are the stories we have told ourselves to make sense of our past. Which is why siblings of the same parents, can interpret their stories differently and live distinctly different futures.

The STORY we need to be telling ourselves is not a recounting of all that went wrong, but creating expectations for what might go right in the week ahead. Not making lists of what we lack, but of ALL the BLESSINGS we have been given. It is God's story that tells us again and again THAT WE ARE LOVED, that we are Precious, that we have Infinite Value in God's eyes.

Part of OUR difficulty this evening, is that I first joined you in October 2019 and six months later everything shut down with COVID19. We have not celebrated the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in our TRADITIONAL WAY in two years. Nor have we had a traditional Maundy Thursday in all the time we have been together. SO many of the STORIES of how things have always been done, have been re-interpreted!

What Jesus was doing with the disciples this night was to celebrate the Passover Seder Meal reinterpreting the Manna from HEAVEN in a new Way. That the life sustaining MANNA of the Wilderness was now known to us in Jesus' body, his life given as an offering for us. That the last of seven cups of wine in the Passover Seder was not only as it had always been, but was Jesus' own blood signing a New Covenant: to love others as we have been loved, sealing the Covenant with God in Jesus' human blood.

Have you been to a Passover Seder?

my favorite part is a prayer called DAYENU, that recites the faith STORY:

LORD God it would have been enough that you created the Sun/ Moon/ Stars/ this Whole World for us...

It would have been enough, that when we had sinned, you washed the World clean for us to start again...

Been enough, that you used Abraham to father a people, chosen to demonstrate your love to the world...

It would have been enough that you saved our enslaved ancestors from their Oppressors in Egypt...

It would have been enough that you fed and guided us for 40 years through the wilderness...

It would have been enough, that you gave us life in a land of freedom, milk and honey...

It would have been enough that you gave your only begotten Son for us...

It would have been enough, that you loved us...

What that prayer in the Seder does is to reframe our Faith STORY not as an historic narrative from 6,000 or even 2,000 years ago, but as our story.

HOWEVER, Jesus understood and confronted his disciples, that the only way we are willing and able to choose to interpret our story differently, is to confront OUR ROLE in OUR lives, to take responsibility for who we want to be.

Different from the Prophet Nathan with King David, Jesus does not tell a parable saying “Thou Art the Man” or pointing a finger of accusation, that Judas would betray him; that Peter would deny him over and over; that every one of Jesus’ disciples would react with hostility or fear; or that it felt GOD too had abandoned him.

Instead, far more effectively, Jesus invites each, and everyone coming to this table, to question their own confession: “Is it I Lord, Is it I?” Only when we own our own role in our stories, not as victim or as hero, but for what we have chosen to do or leave undone, can we move on to live in the present.

Years ago in a Presbytery there was an Investigative Commission. Now the only time there are Investigating Commissions is when someone files charges against a Minister or Session for wrong doing. The difficulty is that is that for the next several months as the Commission do their work, no one knows who is accused or about what. AND in the next six months there were announced 7 more Investigative Commissions, so we all began to say to one another “Is it I Lord, Is it I?”

This confrontation: Is it I Lord, Is it I? is what we are to consider when we accept and when we offer to our neighbor the body and blood of Christ in Communion.

Passing the Offering plates for the first time a few weeks ago, we shared the experience, that in one congregation there were literally 8 different seating sections, some pews so small only one or two could sit by themselves. After forming a committee to study and make recommendations to Session, we held a Testosterone Sunday during which the whole church got down on their hands and knees, unscrewing the pews, rearranging them as two sections with a center aisle. While this worked so much better for the Choir to Process, for Brides to enter, or a Casket to be wheeled in; what no one ever considered was that now instead of sitting by themselves, worshippers needed to serve one another.

Throughout these last two years, we have made adaptations and accommodations, while we have been unwilling and unable to risk serving one another. Finally, there have been two Potluck meals, we have passed the Offering plates, we are told that infection rates are low enough, inoculation rates high enough that we can risk serving one another anew.

Last Friday, Pastor Diane preached the sermon for our Stephen Ministers’ Graduation Retreat. In which she told a story from Ann Voskamp titled The Broken Way. She told a story from a Pastor, of how he had been in an Orthodox Jewish Classroom in Jerusalem, where the old Rabbi had been describing 1st Century Jewish customs, as at the time of Jesus. Among these was the custom surrounding a Marriage Proposal. When their family agreed to engraft a new woman into the family, the Mother would fill a glass of wine that the Father would pass to his adult Son. The Son would hold the glass for the woman he loved, and with all the solemnity of a sacred Oath or Vow, the Man would hold the Cup for her saying the words: *“This Cup is A New Covenant in my Blood which I offer to You.”* The words of Jesus this night, our COMMUNION, are a Wedding Proposal and Marriage Covenant. Jesus is the Bridegroom inviting us all into this relationship.