

Gird Your Loins
United Church of Broomfield
September 10, 2023

Exodus 12:1-14 (NRSVue)

¹The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ²“This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ⁴If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. ¹⁰You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn with fire. ¹¹This 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. ¹²I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, from human to animal, and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

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.

At some time or another, we've all had to hurry through a meal and hurry away from the table. And so, at some time or another, we've all found ourselves saying, "I hate to eat and run, but...."

Everybody has done it. Everybody knows what it's like.

But even though everyone has said they hate to eat and run; the truth is that not everyone does hate it. Some like it.

This about kids during the summer. The weather is warm and it stays light later, so what is dinner other than an interruption. You're reluctant to come in from playing when called for dinner; but you hurry in, scarf down food as fast as possible and as soon as you're finished, you beg to be excused so that you could go back outside and play some more.

I don't know about you, but as a kid that happened a time or two.

Parents are forever telling their children not to wolf down their food, but to chew their food properly, and not to eat so fast; "You'll give yourself a tummy ache." We can't deny the fact that children like to eat and run.

And there are many adults who like to eat and run, too. We feel so busy, or so pressured, or so involved in our work that stopping to eat feels like an interruption. Consequently, some folks stop working just long enough to sit down and eat, and then they go right back to work. There are still others who do not even stop to eat: They eat while they work, and they work while they eat. They don't so much "eat and run" as they do "eat **ON** the run."

Truth be told: We live in a culture that likes to eat and run. We are surrounded by fast-food restaurants, drive-thru windows, restaurants that promise speedy delivery, and microwaveable food. America is an eat-and-run culture.

I'm not an expert on digestion or nutrition, but I suspect that eating and running — or eating on the run — is not the healthiest way to do it. I'm pretty sure that it's healthier to take time to eat, and time to digest. And I'm sure you would agree that the eat-and-run approach of our culture is partly to blame for our indigestion, our heartburn, our overeating, and our fat.

Who's to blame for this? God. Several thousand years ago, on the night of the first Passover, God instructed God's people exactly **how** one eats and runs.

The children of Israel had been slaves in Egypt since the generation after Joseph. By this point in the story, their bondage had lasted 400 years, with no end in sight. But on this particular night, Moses gave the people specific and unusual instructions from God. There was a certain menu that they were to prepare: lamb, bread, and bitter herbs. There was a specified way of preparing it, as well: the lamb was to be roasted, and the bread unleavened. And, too, there was a certain way that they were supposed to eat this prescribed meal: "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."

If you've ever traveled to Europe, you'll know that European dining is quite different in America. On Adam and my last trip to Istanbul, a friend took us out to dinner and we were greeted at a sidewalk bistro by the owners who, for over four hours, brought us appetizers, entrees, drinks and desserts. There were strolling musicians, cigars and lounging as we met new friends and chatted the night away. Absolutely nothing was rushed or hurried.

Contrast American dining where a restaurant's goal is to seat you, feed you, and turn the table for the next diners as fast as possible. And compare this first Passover meal. You may have to leave at any minute, so there just one dish being served. There's certainly no time for enjoying a leisurely meal: shovel it in, eat it quickly, and wolf it down — be prepared for you may need to be out the door in a matter of moments.

For four hundred years, the Hebrews had been in bondage to the Egyptians, experiencing pain, drudgery and oppression. Night after night passed without relief and generation after generation passed without deliverance. The hurry-up feeling of that first Passover meal was quite different than the slow, excruciating and dreadful existence they knew. There was no reason for them to hurry, rush or "gird your loins!"

They were likely feeling more despair than hope that night. After all, even when it seemed that deliverance finally arrived, it became an exercise in patience and waiting. Being prepared is important and necessary, but it can sometimes be infuriatingly slow. After so much fruitless waiting, plague after plague, suddenly the Hebrews were put on high alert. After an eternity on the tarmac, now the captain wants us to fasten our seat belts and believe that we're actually going to take off?

Across their slave ghetto in Egypt that night, the Hebrews slaughtered their lambs and slathered the blood on their doors. With sandals on and walking sticks in hand, they ate their meal in haste. Outside, the wails of grief could be heard from Egyptian households, and in the middle of the night, Moses was summoned to Pharaoh's presence. It was over. The king of Egypt surrendered to the singular God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. With girded loins it's time to go. The Israelites were finally free.

For us as Christians, the occasion of the Passover meal naturally reminds us of Jesus' Last Supper and, by extension, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper with Jesus' association of the bread with his body and the cup with his blood. The Jewish Passover meal took on new meaning for us as Christians. For us, it is not the symbolism of unleavened bread that is meaningful but rather the symbolism of broken bread. We do not partake of the lamb and the bitter herbs, but only the bread and the cup.

The Lord specified to Moses and the people that "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." And we are reminded likewise of the ordinance of Christ at the Last Supper: "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."¹

Meanwhile, the symbolism of the original Passover event plainly reminds us of our salvation. The central role of a male lamb without blemish and the idea of being saved by "the blood of the Lamb" is part of our gospel vocabulary as Christians. Even in New Testament times, the earliest Christians had already begun to identify Jesus as "our paschal lamb."²

While the occasion of the Passover meal reminds us of Jesus' Last Supper, and the symbolism of the Passover event reminds us of our salvation, the style of the Passover meal should prompt us to think of something else. Something future, not past.

You and I do not await our deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Neither do we need to wait for the salvation that is offered in Christ. Yet we do wait. Night after night, generation after generation, century after century, we wait. We gird our loins. We prepare.

One day, Jesus told his disciples what would happen to him in Jerusalem, and within a few months it had occurred. Jesus told them that he would rise again, and within three days of his death he had. Jesus told the disciples to tarry in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high, and within two months came the Day of Pentecost.

Jesus also told his followers that he would return. It did not happen as quickly as they expected.

Soon the apostles needed to begin answering the churches' questions about the believers who had died, about Christ's delay, and about life in the meantime. After so long a wait, it would be an easy thing — natural, really — for us to live with diminished expectations. To let one day flow mindlessly into the next, with no real hope that today might be the day. To relax. To **un-gird** our loins.

Jesus anticipated that possibility, that risk. He noted that the servant might observe, "My master is delayed in coming"³ and consequently neglect his duties. But scripture warns us again and again that his coming will be sudden and unexpected. And so we are urged to "be ready" (Luke 12:40), "keep awake" (Matthew 25:13), and "be alert" (Luke 21:36).

The ancient Israelites were told on the night of Passover, to eat the bread of haste, to dine with coat on and staff in hand, and to eat quickly, for they needed to be ready to leave. You and I, today, are not told to eat like that; we are instructed to **LIVE** like that. People get ready, there's a train a-coming ...destined for the Kin-dom.

¹ 1 Cor. 11:25

² 1 Cor. 5:7

³ Luke 12:45

Be ready to advocate. Be ready to love. Be ready to step into action at a moment's notice because we are to live each day with a posture of readiness, "because our redemption is drawing near."⁴

Amen.

⁴ Luke 21:28