



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Youth

LESSON 5

GOD FREES GOD'S PEOPLE

SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY

The finger of God “passes over” the specially marked doors of the Israelites while sending the tenth plague into the houses of the Egyptians, killing their firstborn sons. As a result, the Israelites are freed from slavery.

Under the leadership of Moses, whom God called to free the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, the Israelites find themselves at the shores of the Red Sea, with the Egyptian army behind them. As they cry out in despair and panic, God commands Moses to lift his arms, and the sea parts on both sides. The whole camp of the Israelites—hundreds of thousands of men, women and children—walk on dry land to the other side of the sea.

The Egyptian army thunders behind them, ready to overtake the people and to kill them. When the last person has crossed the Red Sea, Moses turns around and again lifts his arms. The sea closes in on the army and drowns them. The people are free.

KEY CONCEPTS

- Understanding our Jewish heritage
- Liberation
- Empathy

WHERE YOU'LL FIND TODAY'S STORY

In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

Exodus 1 and 2 (The beginning of the story)

Exodus 12:1-42; 13:17-15:21 (The Passover and Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea)

In Our Sunday Lectionary

Today's story is told in church on the following Sundays:

Years A, B and C: Maundy Thursday

Year A: Easter Day (*BCP*), Proper 16 (*RCL*),
Proper 18, Proper 19



WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

In this story of the exodus, the meaning of creation is seen in the light of redemption: *God's love is*

liberating.

We see this liberating love in our own lives. Resentment and grudges enslave us; we know that what God calls us to—what God is—is compassionate love, mercy, forgiveness, humility.

And then let us expand the idea of liberating love into the social realm. The story of the Israelites' liberation from oppression has obvious resonance in our world today. Although there is no longer any legalized slavery, there is still enslavement and bondage—sometimes in the form of institutionalized support for such oppressions as poverty and racism. Such injustice is against God's will. A beloved community of God is a community of free persons.

But from this story of the exodus, we learn two things. First, we learn that God forges us through hardship. The Israelites in their long journey become a people, the People of God. They become strong and faithful and moral. And those qualities have lasted even to this day.

Second, we learn that in hardship, we can gain the gift of empathy with others. God reminds the Israelites—more than two dozen times in Exodus, Deuteronomy and Leviticus alone!—"You were slaves in the land of Egypt" and "I brought you out of bondage in Egypt." Eleven times, God in the Bible tells us, "You shall love the sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt."

God uses our hard times to help us understand the hard times of others, so that we can minister to them as God ministers to us.

The Passover

God says, "Remember, remember, remember!"

This command is embodied in the law "Remember to love the sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt." And it is embodied in the Jewish calendar, in the observance of the Passover (Pesach). This festival, observed in March or April, commemorates the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt, their liberation from slavery by God's hand.

The people sought to celebrate the meal as if they themselves had come out of Egypt—"out of bondage to freedom, from sorrows to gladness, and from mourning to festival day, and from darkness to great light, and from servitude to redemption" (Pesach 10:5). Thus the Passover meal is eaten in haste, with participants dressed for flight—sandals on and staff in hand. Unleavened bread is eaten because of the haste with which the Israelites had to flee. There was no time for bread to rise.

Why is this Jewish feast important to us? What is its significance to Christians? The Passover is important because Christianity has a Jewish heritage that we must not forget. After all, Jesus himself was a faithful Palestinian Jew who lived and preached and ministered in that context.

Today we associate Passover with Holy Week because Jesus' last supper took place on that day or the day before. But today we will see the celebration on its own terms and with its own integrity. For the remembrance, story and celebration of liberation is for all of us. When the oppressed are liberated, all are free. When some are enslaved or oppressed, all are. So in this meal, the Jews shed tears for the Egyptians. Can we be so compassionate as to shed tears for the bondage of oppressors even as we work for liberation for the oppressed?



THE EPISCOPAL THREAD

Today's story is such an important part of God's Story and our story as God's people, that we find references and echoes of the Exodus throughout our

Book of Common Prayer and our Anglican tradition in general.

As Episcopalians, we affirm our connection to and our dependence on our Jewish heritage and the Hebrew Scripture, which we refer to as the Old Testament. We affirm the importance of the Hebrew tradition and the part that it played in the life and ministry of Jesus, a first-century, Palestinian Jew. Thus the story of the Exodus, the definitive event in the life and identity of the Jewish people, is also essential to our faith. The New Testament does not supersede the Old Testament; the presence of the Son of God fulfills the covenant made between God and us in the Old Testament; it does not replace it. Therefore, we happily turn to Old Testament readings to give us insights into the love of God for the people of God.

We also take our essential communal spirituality and sense of identity as people of God from the forging of Israel to be God's people, through this searing experience of the Exodus and the subsequent giving of the Law by God at Mount Sinai.

This story, under the title "Israel's Deliverance at the Red Sea," is the only reading at the Great Vigil of Easter that is a *required* reading. Of the lessons, the rubrics on page 288 of the *Book Common Prayer* say, "At least two of the...Lessons are read, of which one is always the Lesson from Exodus."

Look also in the Thanksgiving over the Water in our Rite of Holy Baptism, on page 306. As we give thanks to God for the gift of water, we note that "through it you led the children of Israel out of the bondage in Egypt into the land of promise."

In Morning Prayer, the Song of Moses (Canticle 8, p. 85), which Moses sings after the deliverance by God at the Red Sea, is one of the canticles which can be said between the biblical lessons. We say these canticles daily as part of our praise to God.

Our hymns also celebrate the deliverance at the Red Sea, especially in connection with our deliverance from death through Jesus' resurrection. We also sing of the paschal bloodshed, with Jesus as the Paschal Lamb in place of the paschal lamb of the Passover. See, for example, #174, "At the Lamb's high feast we sing," #187, "Through the Red Sea brought at last, Alleluia!" and #199, "Come, ye faithful, raise the strain." Can you find others?

Although we, as Christians, do not observe Passover, we share with the Jews the heritage that is contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, or the Old Testament. Thus we share with the Jewish tradition the stories, the liturgical and sacramental orientation, and the themes of faithfulness, liberation, justice and God's power. All of these themes are contained in the celebration of the Passover.

Look for references to Passover in the Rite of Holy Eucharist, and especially in the Great Vigil of Easter, beginning on page 285: "For this is the Passover of the Lord...in which...we share in his victory over death."

On page 286, the deacon prays to God, "This is the night, when you brought our fathers, the children of Israel, out of bondage in Egypt, and led them through the Red Sea on dry land," the Passover being the beginning of that great night of liberation.



GATHERING

Check-In

Invite group members to sit comfortably, giving them an opportunity to visit with each other, establish friendships and build community. Relationships are an important dimension of Christian formation, so a few minutes of visiting will enrich their spiritual development. This is also the perfect time to check in with group members by asking them to share how they are feeling at the time or what kind of a week they had.



PRAYER

Materials:

- small table with cloth to cover it
- taper candle or one pillar candle
- matches
- cross

After all group members have a few minutes of fellowship time, gather them together for a simple opening prayer.

Ask one of the members to light the candle(s) while saying these words from Psalm 119:105:

- Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Explain that you are inviting the light of God to be with all of you. (You might consider posting that reading in the meeting room.)

Invite the member who lit the candle to read this prayer:

- God of love, make us ever mindful of the privilege and responsibility of freedom, especially the freedom to worship and praise you openly and without fear. We pray for those who do not yet have this right that they may one day escape the oppression that binds them, and that they may know the joy and peace that come from loving you. In Jesus' name we pray. *Amen.*

Or use any prayer from the *Book of Common Prayer* or from any book of prayers, or make one up yourself.

Carefully extinguish the candle.



TELLING THE STORY

Set the Scene: Quote of the Day

Post the following quote in the room and ask a member of the group to read it aloud. Ask the group members what the quote means to them:

- Religion without humanity is very poor human stuff (Sojourner Truth).

Sojourner Truth took her name from the Bible. Ask the group why they think she chose that name.

Tell the story of the first Passover from the book of Exodus and the story of the Israelites' flight from Egypt. We also suggest that you use a contemporary book about Passover, or use the information about this special day that is written for you at the end of this lesson.

Do not try to analyze the story at this time. Let the power of the story itself—and God's awesome presence in that story—become a part of the hearts of the youth.

For an additional resource, see *A Christian Passover Seder*, John Pontier (Gaston, OR: Doorposts, 2012).



WEAVING GOD'S BELOVED COMMUNITY

Lesson Box

Materials:

- 1 3" x 5" index card for the day's *scribe*

- pen or pencil
- file box in which to store the cards

Ask for a volunteer or assign a student to act as class *scribe*. Then, ask the group to articulate the most important lesson gleaned from the day's reading. As a prompt, you might ask:

- Why is it important for us to remember the Jewish story of Passover?
- When you think of the fight for freedom, who comes to mind and why?
- God said, "Remember, remember, remember!" Why is it important to keep such stories alive?

Once the class has agreed on its wording, ask the *scribe* to write the lesson on the card, date it and file it in the box. By the end of the year, you will have a wonderful and thorough summation of the lessons covered—in the participants' own words.



CLOSING PRAYER

Before the group leaves, say a closing prayer to send them into the church worship service

or back to their homes with God's love and blessing.

The prayer can be very simple, such as this one:

- Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (*BCP*, p. 823)

End with a dismissal used in church, such as:

- Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

The group responds:

- Thanks be to God!



SUGGESTED HYMNS

- "Through the Red Sea" #187, *The Hymnal 1982* (New York: Church Publishing, 1982)
- "Come ye, Faithful" #199, *The Hymnal 1982* (New York: Church Publishing, 1982)
- "Oh, Freedom!" #225, *Lift Every Voice and Sing II*, (New York: Church Publishing, 1993)
- "Keep the Dream Alive" #229, *Lift Every Voice and Sing II*, (New York: Church Publishing, 1993)
- "Sh'ma Yisrael (Hear, O Israel)" #818, *Wonder, Love, and Praise* (New York: Church Publishing, 1997)



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EMPATHY AND SYMPATHY: ALIKE BUT DIFFERENT

Group members talk about empathy and sympathy.

Materials:

copies of the worksheet, *Empathy and Sympathy—Which is Which?* (p. 8) 1 per participant
pens and pencils

Preparation:

Make enough copies of the worksheet for the entire group.

Directions:

1. Take a few minutes to talk about the words *empathy* and *sympathy*. Though they sound alike, they are different:
 - Empathy is most simply defined as “sharing feelings *with* someone else.”
 - Sympathy is most simply defined as “having feelings *about* someone or something.”
2. You might give the following example to illustrate the difference:
 - Jackie felt sorry for the children who’d lost their parents in the war. (*sympathy*)
 - Jackie understood what Ann was going through because she, too, had been bullied in school. (*empathy*)
3. Hand out the worksheets and give the group 5-10 minutes to complete it. Then, bring them back together to share and discuss their responses.

Worksheet answer key:

1. S
2. E
3. E
4. S
5. S
6. E
7. E
8. E
9. S
10. S
11. E

EMPATHY AND SYMPATHY— WHICH IS WHICH?

Which of the statements below demonstrate a person's empathy, and which display sympathy? Mark each one with an *E* or an *S*.

- _____ 1. On behalf of the people of this country, may I express my deepest sorrow for the miners lost in the accident.
- _____ 2. I had to run that race in high heels! Now I get how women feel in those shoes!
- _____ 3. I feel your pain!
- _____ 4. Today, the class will write letters to soldiers in Afghanistan.
- _____ 5. Hearing about starving children makes me feel so sad.
- _____ 6. When Mark found out that the new kid in his class was also adopted, they became fast friends.
- _____ 7. Don't worry about failing the driver's test; you can try again. In fact, I had to take it three times before I passed!
- _____ 8. I heard about your loss; my grandma passed away last year.
- _____ 9. I heard that you lost your pet. Is there anything I can do to help you feel better?
- _____ 10. Not to worry: lots of people are scared of elevators, too. Let's take the stairs.
- _____ 11. The support group turned out to be a good thing for her because everyone else had been through the same trauma!

In the space below, write your own examples of *sympathy* and *empathy*:



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CELEBRATING PASSOVER

This is an excellent intergenerational activity. Participants learn about the origin of Passover and will celebrate a traditional *seder* with traditional foods. Plan for two sessions: one for cooking and one for celebrating the *seder*.

Materials:

ingredients needed for each recipe on pages 11-14, depending on which recipes you choose to prepare (With adequate planning, you may decide to make all three elements of the *seder* meal ahead of time.)
copies of *The Four Questions Asked at the Passover Meal*, page 10, 1 per participant
plates
cups
napkins
copies of the *Book of Common Prayer* (for blessings)

Preparation:

This is an activity for which you may need extra sets of hands, so ask some of the parents to volunteer to help make the foods.

Make the foods the day before the *seder* (or the week before), knowing that the foods will have to be refrigerated (and/or frozen) until served.

Directions:

1. First, hand out *The Four Questions Asked at the Passover Meal*. Share this background with participants:
 - It's spring, time for Passover. And now it's time for the *seder*, the special meal where the story of Passover is told.
 - When everybody gathers around the table for the *seder* on the first night of Passover, the youngest among them asks the Four Questions, beginning with "Why is this night different from all other nights?" (*Review the Four Questions on the handout.*) Everybody answers by reading aloud from a small book called the *Haggadah*. It tells how Jews were slaves in Egypt and how God helped them, and us, become free.
 - We taste bitter herbs, and as our mouths pucker we think, "This is how bitter it was to be a slave."
 - We crunch the flat, hard *matzoh* and remember how our people had to grab their bread before it could rise, and how they ran out of Egypt to find freedom.
And for the entire week of Passover, we eat special food on special dishes to celebrate the time when Jews went from slavery to freedom.
 - On the *seder* table is a tall cup of wine that nobody drinks. It's reserved for the prophet Elijah. In our tradition, Elijah visits each *seder* and takes a sip. He is our most welcome *seder* guest. But the *seder* is open to anyone who is far from home—students, tourists and other travelers.
2. Together prepare and share one or more of the foods found on pages 11-14.

THE FOUR QUESTIONS ASKED AT THE PASSOVER MEAL

1. On all other nights we eat all kinds of breads and cracker. Why do we eat only matzoh on Pesach (Passover)? (Matzoh reminds us that when the Jews left the slavery of Egypt they had no time to bake their bread. They took the raw dough on their journey and baked it in the hot desert sun into hard crackers called matzoh.)
2. On all other nights we eat many kinds of vegetables and herbs. Why do we eat bitter herbs—maror—at our seder? (Maror reminds us of the bitter and cruel way the Pharaoh treated the Jewish people when they were slaves in Egypt.)
3. On all other nights we don't usually dip one food into another. At our seder we dip the parsley in saltwater and the bitter herbs in Haroseth. Why do we dip our foods twice tonight? (We dip bitter herbs into Haroseth to remind us how hard the Jewish slaves worked in Egypt. The chopped apples and nuts look like the clay used to make the bricks used in building the Pharaoh's buildings.)

We dip parsley into saltwater. The parsley reminds us that spring is here and new life will grow. The saltwater reminds us of the tears of the Jewish slaves.)

4. On all other nights we eat sitting up straight. Why do we lean on a pillow tonight? (We lean on a pillow to be comfortable and to remind us that once we were slaves, but now we are free.)



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PASSOVER FOOD: MAKING HAROSETH

Haroseth is a traditional Passover food made with chopped walnuts, wine, cinnamon and apples. It represents the mortar or clay that the Hebrew slaves used to make the Pharaoh's bricks. This recipe uses grape juice instead of wine.

Materials (for 8 servings):

2 apples
½ cup chopped walnuts (*please do not use peanuts*)
½-¾ cup grape juice
½ teaspoon cinnamon
½ cup raisins
chopping board
measuring cups
measuring spoons
mixing bowl
mixing spoons
small paper cups or bowls
plastic spoons
knives

Directions:

1. Core the apples and chop them into small diced pieces. Place the apples in a bowl.
2. Add nuts, cinnamon, raisins and grape juice and mix well.
3. Pour into the cups or bowls and serve.



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PASSOVER FOOD 1: MATZOH AND EGGS

Matzoh is made without yeast, according to tradition, because the Hebrews did not have time for their bread to rise before leaving their homes in a hurry. They needed to have their sandals on and their staffs in their hands while eating quickly.

The hard-boiled eggs are a symbol of spring, when the Passover meal takes place. The saltwater is a reminder of the tears of the Hebrew slaves. Usually bitter herbs such as parsley are dipped into the saltwater.

Materials (for 8 servings):

8 hard-boiled eggs
salt
water
2 cups whole wheat flour, plus extra for dusting hands
oil
pot
two mixing bowls
mixing spoons
measuring cups
fork
baking sheet
rolling pin
paper plates
waxed paper

Preparation:

Hard boil the eggs.

Grease the baking sheet with oil.

Directions for matzoh:

1. In one bowl, mix the flour with $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water to make the *matzoh* dough. Dust lightly with flour.
2. Flour your hands. Divide the dough into as many pieces as there are people.
3. Knead the dough for 3-5 minutes, then roll flat with a rolling pin. The dough should be rolled to around $\frac{1}{8}$ " thick.
4. Place flat dough on greased baking sheet. Prick with a fork and sprinkle with salt.

5. Bake for 8-10 minutes at 450° .
6. When done, eat while soft. Or leave it in the turned-off oven until crisp.

Directions for hard-boiled eggs:

1. Hard boil the eggs, if you haven't already.
2. Peel the eggs.
3. Mix salt with water in small bowl.
4. Dip the hard-boiled eggs into the saltwater.

2: UNLEAVENED BREAD

Materials:

electric skillet
whole wheat flour
salt
measuring cups
mixing bowls
measuring spoons
water
oil
paper towels
plastic knives
horseradish
honey

Preparation:

Divide participants into groups of three, so that everybody can participate in making the dough.

Directions:

1. Measure 1 cup of flour and pour it into the bowl.
2. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of salt and add it to the flour.
3. Stir in $\frac{1}{2}$ of cup water.
4. Turn the mixture onto a lightly floured clean surface and take turns kneading for a total of 5 minutes.
5. After kneading, divide the dough into three balls. Flatten the ball into a circle.
6. Fry the rounds of dough in a hot skillet. Set on a paper towel to cool. Eat with horseradish (the “bitter herbs” in the Passover meal) or with honey.



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AMISTAD—THE MOVIE: A TRUE STORY OF THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM AND JUSTICE

Group members will watch and discuss the movie, *Amistad* (Universal City, CA: Dreamworks Studio, 1997).

Note: Please note that this movie is rated **R**. Parents must be notified and, if possible, should watch the movie ahead of time and determine on their own whether or not to allow their children to watch it.

Materials:

TV with DVD player and copy of the movie *Amistad* or computer with Internet access and speakers
optional: snacks and juice

Preparation:

Two weeks before showing this film, contact all of your group members' parents about the movie. Ask them to watch it, if possible, or hold a screening one night for them. Let them know that you will be showing the movie within the context of a lesson on freedom and injustice.

You may rent the movie *or* view it for free on a number of websites, including <http://www.imdb.com>.

Directions:

1. The movie, *Amistad*, tells the true story of a mutiny on board a slave ship traveling from Africa to America and the ensuing court trial. Some parts of the movie are disturbing but accurately portray the treatment of the slaves.
2. Once you have finished watching the movie, a discussion will not be difficult to start! Among some of the questions you may want to ask are:
 - Why did the slaves stage a mutiny? Were they right to do so?
 - Why did the lawyer take the case of the slaves? Why did he feel strongly about their plight?
 - What role did John Adams play in this piece of history?
 - What does his defense tell you about John Adams, the man?
 - *Captivity/freedom; injustice/justice; slavery/liberation; sympathy/empathy.* Relate these pairs of words to the film.



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TIED IN KNOTS

Group members learn how to tie (and untie) a variety of knots. In addition, they will talk about the things that hold them “captive” or have them “tied up in knots.” They will use their knots to create a display for the congregation to view.

Materials:

- several yards of good rope for tying knots (not too thick or thin)
- scissors
- 3" x 5" index cards
- pens and pencils
- stapler

Preparation:

Type “knots” into your web browser. Be prepared for several illustrations on knot-tying.

Print off a page of basic knot techniques (plus a few more difficult knots for your adventurous youth).

Print enough copies of the sheet for everyone in the group.

Directions:

1. Give each member one or two lengths of rope (at least 6"-12" inches long, depending on the intricacy of the knot).
2. Offer them the following instructions:
 - Try making each knot. Then, choose your favorite knots and make one for display on the bulletin board.
 - On the index card, write “I am a slave to” **OR** “I am held captive by” and finish the sentence. The completion of the statement is something that you’d like to be done with, or a characteristic you’d like to change.
 - For example: “I am a slave to my need to be popular.” **OR** “I am held captive by spending an hour to make my hair perfect every single day.”
 - Then, write and complete the following: “What would set me free is...” Possible answers include:
 - Not caring what other people think
 - Being thankful for the friends I have already
 - Saying a quiet prayer every time I felt this way
 - Talking and laughing about it with a good friend

Close:

Make a display on a bulletin board for the congregation to see and enjoy!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For further reading about the use of children to fight in civil wars, human trafficking/slavery of children, or the Lost Boys of Sudan, consult the following:

Books:

- *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*. Ishmael Beah (New York: Farrar Straus and Girous, LLC, 2007)
- *God Grew Tired of Us*. John Bul Dau (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2008) **Note:** a movie of the same name is available for instant streaming at <http://www.imdb.com>.

Websites:

- <http://www.unicef.org/protection/index.html>
- <http://www.un.org/en/events/slaveryabolitionday/>