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**The Christian Journey****Exodus 16:2-15** □

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days." So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?" And Moses said, "When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord."

Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.'" And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked towards the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. The Lord spoke to Moses and said, "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'at twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'"

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat." □Exodus 16: 2-15

Matthew 20: 1-16

[And Jesus said:] "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market place; and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he

did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Life itself is often described as a journey. Whether it's the comedy of Chaucer's merry band of story tellers or Eugene O'Neill's *Long Days' Journey Into Night*, we have this metaphor of life as going from one place to another, and what happens as we travel from our whence to our whither.

For Christians, life as a journey is written into our central symbol, our most holy sacrament, and the celebration of Holy Communion. In Communion, we share with the Jews the memory of the Exodus, the flight from slavery in Egypt which was taken so quickly there was no time to let the bread rise. Unleavened bread is the sign of the urgency and tension that is part and parcel of the movement from slavery to the Promised Land. The Passover meal, which Jesus was celebrating with his disciples in the Last Supper, is a remembering of the blood of the lamb that was posted over the doorpost of every Hebrew family so that the angel of death would pass by and not take the first born son. What the Jews even today celebrate as an historical event, we take as not only historical—something in the past—but also as symbolic and metaphorical—having deep meaning for our present and our future. The blood of Christ crucified is the blood of the lamb that was killed so that we might be spared when the angel of death passes by. For us, it is liberation from the chains of sin, liberation from the claims made on us by principalities and powers, things that strangle the life out of us to pull us into the clutches of false gods, false promises, unauthentic life and wasted, meaningless life. As we say in our Statement of Faith, we are saved from aimlessness and sin—sin as having no aim, no goal, no destination, no purpose or meaning to our lives. All of this is based on the central event of our faith life before Jesus, the Exodus. And in Jesus that journey from slavery to freedom finds new and broader meaning: it is not just for Jews: it is for all humankind.

Everyone is invited to journey with Jesus. You, your parents, your children. We are all invited to walk with Jesus.

Did you ever stop to think about how much walking Jesus did? Open your bible to anywhere in the gospels, and you will find Jesus is a man on the move, always going from one place to the next. He no sooner sits down to give a sermon on the mount than he gets up to go and heal someone who touches his robe or who calls to him while he's walking. He picks his disciples and says, "Come, follow me." Follow means move. It means get up off your duff and walk. If your sick in bed and Jesus heals you, he tells you to get up and walk—don't stay in bed. If he finishes his teaching and healing, he's off to the mountain to pray or he's in a boat moving on the water to get away from it all. Jesus is always in motion, right through to his final walk with a cross to Calvary. And where is he seen after that? Walking on the road to Emmaus. The women find an empty tomb and instead of spending time in confusion or despair, they are told to get up and go, because Jesus is already going before them. Jesus never stops except to heal, to teach or to catch his breath, i.e., to receive inspiration (breathing in) by sitting still and waiting for God, listening to God.

The journey with Jesus is still an Exodus, still a movement from slavery to freedom. We may not realize our slavery until life pushes our face in it and we begin to realize how tied we are to a habit, a routine, a goal, a way of living.

As modern (or post-modern!) sophisticated, educated, savvy people who are tuned into the world, we don't talk about sin very much. Since we live in America, the land of the free, we think—we assume—we are free. But events of the past several days have made it abundantly clear that what we call our freedom was built on a vast complex network of trust and responsibility, a network as fragile as a bubble, and when freedom is pursued without concern for the network of the whole, when people pursue their greed without regard for others, when people get caught up in the illusion that everyone can be rich if they're smarter and faster than the next guy, then sooner or later, the bubble will burst. There is no freedom without responsibility. And we suffer; we all suffer, for everyone's irresponsibility.

We are living an historical moment. Our grandchildren and great grandchildren will read about these days. It will surpass the Great Depression—if not in the masses of suffering, at least in this: that the paradigm of uncontrolled selfishness and greed as the engine that runs America does not and cannot work. The assumption that capitalism, unrestrained by any consideration for the well being of all people, both at home and abroad—will not serve democracy, will not serve freedom, will not serve the human spirit. We may not know what shape our fiscal, financial and political future may take, but we know that we are in the midst of a sea change.

In the language of journeying, the road we were travelling on has just been bombed and we are all standing over a huge abyss; some have already fallen in, others are clinging desperately onto the edgy, and still others worry about the cracks in the ground under their feet, and wonder what the short-term and long-term future may bring.

What questions, born of pain and chaos, will we ask of ourselves, ask of our leaders—religious, economic, political? Will we open ourselves to deep analysis of how our values made this bombing inevitable? Will we point fingers at this person or that, as if we were not involved in the creation of the bubble and the illusions that kept it afloat? Why is that, with all the modern conveniences that were supposed to make life easier and leisure more available, more people are working more hours per week than at any other time in history since slavery?

Define happiness without reference to your assumptions about what it takes to support your life style. Once we're on a track—a track defined by our financial obligations that are inked to what we think we have to have in order to be “happy,” we have lost our freedom. We are slaves to a system of our own making, just as surely as Pharaoh ruled over the Hebrews in Egypt.

Can we use this crisis as an opportunity to ask the hard questions: am I happy with the way I'm living? Do I find satisfaction and reward in how I spend my time, my energy, and my money?

Am I contributing to the larger church, society and world by my gifts of time, energy and money?

Is my life guided by a vision of the future not just for my family, and myself but also for Rockville Centre, Oceanside, Nassau County, the United States and the entire world? The relevance of this question should be obvious to us in this crisis that shows us how interconnected we are to everyone else on this planet. Any vision for the future that looks out for oneself only, or “one's own” however defined to limit who is considered--- any such vision is shortsighted and short-lived. Unless you're making over \$1 million each week, your well being is very much tied to the well being of the rest of the world. All the more so in a time of global warming.

In Christian terms, God is the God of everyone, regardless of creed, race or class.

If life is a journey and we're taking it with Jesus, where is Jesus now?

Jesus is where Jesus always was and will be: he is found among the poor, the disenfranchised, the homeless, the sick, those in jail, and the hungry. Jesus is with those who have lost or nearly lost their pensions, their homes, and their cars. Those who cannot afford health insurance. Those who are wounded in body, mind or spirit to the point they cannot function. Jesus is with all of us in our slaveries, our addictions to oil, alcohol, drugs, MP3s, i-pods, television or Wiis.

Jesus is in every one of us. Here. Now. The person sitting in your seat= you. The person sitting next to you.

Jesus calls us to join him on the journey: to find our own place of liberation—where in our lives we need healing, we need to be set free from whatever is binding us in order to be free for helping others. This is the Christian

journey: moving out of slavery into freedom, moving from freedom to service and community.

As a church, now is our time of opportunity. Now we are called to be what and who we are: to be awake to the world, to our own lives and those around us. Now is the time for us to draw together and support and help each other. As your pastor, I want to know how you are faring in these times as in all times. Deacons must keep their eyes and ears open to see and hear the needs of those near us and far from us. Mission needs to keep eyes and ears open to the larger scale needs of the world around us. Christian Education needs to think through new ways of understanding our changing world and how to educate= to lead both children and adults of this congregation in these times. Trustees must think through creative ways of adapting our resources to our needs for growth and maintenance. All members must work and pray and celebrate together – as we're doing right now, as we'll be doing in a few minutes at the picnic. Thus will we make our Christian journey one of joy, thanksgiving, mercy, love and empowerment.

Vaya con dios. Let us all go with God.