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in Cologne Ger-
many.

Sermon Brief
Text: Exodus 12:29-42
Title: A Bright New Day
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Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

We stand today at the beginning of a new year. And this year will bring some significant changes to our church. We have the opportunity to make some giant steps forward in becoming a genuinely ‘ministering church’ during 2010. This past year saw some progress in this direction, but the year before us presents us with significant opportunity to move this way.

What is a ‘ministering church’? As I understand the teachings of the New Testament, it is a congregation based on the principles set forth in Eph. 4:11-16:

11 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, **12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,** 13 until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. 14 We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. 15 But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.

God has gifted this church so that it can effectively serve Him. The leadership of the church is charged to train and prepare the ‘saints’, the members of the church, to do ‘the work of ministry.’ The fundamental responsibility for ministry rests on the members, not on the leaders! In active ministry spiritual growth begins taking place throughout the congregation. Unity of faith occurs. The congregation strengthens itself against false doctrines. God’s church becomes knitted together in unified commitment to serve. Last January I brought a series of sermons on this theme by presenting a vision of what the IBC church Cologne needed to become. During 2009 God dramatically blessed us with growth and stability in so many ways few, if any of us, could have imagined. But in retrospect the reality is that these blessings were intended to get us ready for what God really wants to accomplish through this church.

Now He is calling us to get ready for significant forward movement toward becoming an authentically biblical congregation with ministry by all as the center piece of commitment. In many ways we are standing where the Israelites were as they were preparing to leave Egypt. This moment is described in Exodus 12:29-42. Turn with me in your Bibles to this important text.

29 At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. 30 Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his officials and all the Egyptians; and there was a loud cry in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead. 31 Then he summoned Moses and Aaron in the night, and said, “Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord, as you said. 32 Take your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone. And bring a blessing on me too!”

33 The Egyptians urged the people to hasten their departure from the land, for they said, “We shall all be dead.” 34 So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls wrapped up in their cloaks on their shoulders. 35 The Israelites had done as Moses told them; they had asked the Egyptians for jewelry of silver and gold, and for clothing, 36 and the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. And so they plundered the Egyptians.

37 The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. 38 A mixed crowd also went up with them, and livestock in great numbers, both flocks and herds. 39 They baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt; it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

40 The time that the Israelites had lived in Egypt was four hundred thirty years. 41 At the end of four hundred thirty years, on that very day, all the companies of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. 42 That was for the Lord a night of vigil, to bring them out of the land of Egypt. That same night is a vigil to be kept for the Lord by all the Israelites throughout their generations.

Exodus 12 presents the institution of the Passover celebration among the Israelite people.¹ It is based on the deliverance that God produced by convincing the Egyptian pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt. It took the death of the firstborn among the Egyptians to convince him. Our text describes that experience. Perhaps more accurately, our text celebrates the deliverance from slavery that God produced for the Israelites.

I want to focus on this major event in ancient Israel because I believe it offers to us valuable insights as we approach this coming year in our church. Just as the Israelites stood on the eve of a “Bright New Day” with God’s blessings poised to fall on them, we also stand at the threshold of a ‘Bright New Day’ in our church as we move into this new year. Three points I want to stress from this text and this event in ancient Israel.

BODY

I. A New Day, vv. 29-32.

29 At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. 30 Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his officials and all the Egyptians; and there was a loud cry in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead. 31 Then he summoned Moses and Aaron in the night, and said, “Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord, as you said. 32 Take your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone. And bring a blessing on me too!”

For 430 long years the Hebrew people had existed as slaves in Egypt.² Life had been hard and often frustrating. Much suffering among the people had taken place.³ But God had promised a better day to Abraham and his descendants.⁴ Had God forgotten the Israelites? Were they abandoned and on their own? For some it certainly appear to be this way. Day by day the Hebrew people trudged through life working as the slave property of the Egyptians. The future seemed bleak and pointless for many. Faith in God and His promises were difficult, since God seemed absent from the life of the Hebrews.

Yet in the midst of the hopelessness God moved among the people -- and in a quiet way that few recognized at the time. A son was born to a husband and wife from the house of Levi.⁵ God miraculously kept this baby alive and he grew up in the house of the Egyptian pharaoh. This man would be almost 80 years old before God had him ready for his life’s mission to deliver the Hebrew people from slavery. This man Moses would be used of God to bring the Hebrews out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai where the Lord would reveal His Law to the people. Now Moses would not lead the people into the Promise Land, another leader Joshua would be given that mission.

God’s ways are mysterious and often beyond our ability to fully understand. Our modern fast-food culture wants everything done immediately. Sometimes we try to impose this attitude on to God with the demand that He move in our life, our church, and in our society immediately. But we cannot ever succeed with such demands on God. God is not captive to our demands and expectations! Instead, we must patiently

¹“This material [12:1-15:21] completes the liberation narrative of 1:1–15:21. The section is made up of quite diverse elements. In chapters 12–13, the predominant materials concern specific regulations for cultic remembrance and reenactment of the exodus from bondage, situated in the festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread. In the midst of the cultic regulations, there are brief notices that form a conclusion to the events left unfinished in chapter 11—the implementation of the final “plague.” The position of chapters 12–13 in the larger narrative suggests that the historical event fades off into or has been cast primarily in, through, and for liturgical reenactment. It is, therefore, impossible to sort out what in the narrative is reportage (in a modern fashion) and what is cultic rubric. This means that remembering and celebrating in Israel are acts that have no great interest in the kind of question of historical origin that readily occupies us. Rather, the central concern is that the ancient victory and liberation should be present now and for the coming generations as a way of redefining and reshaping present social reality.” [Walter Brueggemann, “The Book of Exodus,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, iPreach online]

²Cf. Exod. 12:40.

³Exod. 1:8-14 (NRSV): 8 Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 9 He said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. 10 Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” 11 Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. 12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. 13 The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, 14 and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

⁴Gen. 12:1-3 (NRSV): 1 Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁵Exod. 2:1-2 (NRSV): 1 Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. 2 The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months.

wait on God to move in our midst. In His timing and by His own ways the Lord will work in and among us to achieve His goals and objectives. Our task is to remain faithful and trusting in Him.

Over my half-century plus of ministry I have witnessed this pattern time and time again. The Springdale Baptist Church in Fort Worth went through times of great difficulty and struggle. When I became its pastor in June of 1968 it was in the midst of a period of decline and had lots of internal bickering and division. Early on I questioned the wisdom of becoming pastor of this church. The area around the church was an older neighborhood and was caught up in a rapid transition from a nice middle class community of home owners with stable families to a part of the inner city district of the city. This meant the growing dominance of rent homes with highly transient dwellers who moved in and out very often. The future of the church wasn't encouraging at all. Yet, God had different plans in mind. A spiritual awakening began in the church in the summer of 1969, first among the young people and then gradually it spread to the entire congregation. Over the next several years the church experienced a complete transformation. It came alive spiritually and that spiritual dynamic is still present in the church almost forty years later. And I have witnessed similar movements of God in other churches over the years.

What does God have in store for the IBC church Cologne in 2010? No one can say definitively what lays ahead for us. The future is hidden in the mind of God.

But this much I do believe very deeply. I am convinced that we stand today where the Israelites did on that night of Passover celebration when God began moving in dramatic fashion in their midst. They had little basis to hope for liberation from their slavery. In spite of Moses' repeated attempts to secure the pharaoh's permission for them to leave the country, nothing positive had happened. In fact, these attempts had made their life harder with the pharaoh retaliating by imposing harsher regulations on them. And now Moses sent out word to the people to prepare and observe this strange new religious ceremony of eating the roasted meat of a lamb after sprinkling the blood of the sacrificed lamb over and around the door posts of the entrance of their homes. And when they ate the meat they were to be fully dressed for travel.⁶ Then amazingly everything happened as God indicated to Moses, and the Egyptian pharaoh urgently instructed the Israelites to get out of his country as fast as possible. A bright new day dawned among the Hebrews that next morning. All of a sudden the future was filled with hope and excitement of God's deliverance at long last.

God has moved in some unusual ways in our midst over the past several months. When Claire and I began sensing God's calling to step aside from the leadership of the church several months ago, it seemed strange. And yet we have learned not to question God. He knows what He is doing, and can see the future far better than we. How God intends to move this church forward in 2010 I cannot say with great detail. That's hidden inside His will and intention. What we are called upon to do is to trust Him and to follow Him. The Hebrews left Egypt because they sensed God's leadership through Moses to do this. We must move forward in ministry as a church trusting God to open the exact doors ahead that He wants to open for us. Today, I challenge you to follow the example of the ancient Israelites. Prepare yourselves for God's future! He has some exciting things ahead for you!

II. A New Strength, vv. 33-39.

33 The Egyptians urged the people to hasten their departure from the land, for they said, "We shall all be dead."³⁴ So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls wrapped up in their cloaks on their shoulders. 35 The Israelites had done as Moses told them; they had asked the Egyptians for jewelry of silver and gold, and for clothing, 36 and the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. And so they plundered the Egyptians.

37 The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot,

⁶Exod. 12:1-13 (NRSV): 1 The 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. 3 Tell 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. 4 If 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. 5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6 You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. 7 They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. 8 They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 9 Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. 10 You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. 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. 12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. 13 The 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.

besides children. 38 A mixed crowd also went up with them, and livestock in great numbers, both flocks and herds. 39 They baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt; it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

The picture in these verses is fascinating. With the cries of the Egyptians everywhere mourning the loss of their first born, they urged the Hebrews to leave quickly. The Israelites had already asked the Egyptians for jewelry and clothing -- items needed for their journey and their worship in the desert. So the people left Egypt in great numbers, journeying from Rameses to Succoth across the Sea of Reeds. The miracle of deliverance took place by the hand of Almighty God. They could not have done this on their own. Humanly speaking there's no way this small group of slaves should be liberated from the control of the much more powerful Egyptians. The Egyptians even thought later that they should re-capture the Hebrews and bring them back to Egypt.⁷ Interestingly, the direction that God led the Israelites was illogical from a human view point, as Exod. 13:17-18 makes clear:

17 When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was nearer; for God thought, "If the people face war, they may change their minds and return to Egypt." 18 So God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of the land of Egypt prepared for battle.

God's strategy was to prepare the Israelites to come into the Land of Promise only after going through many struggles to toughen them and to train them to handle the situation. The Israelites had to learn to be survivalists! To depend on God for everything and to trust God's leadership over them, no matter how strange that might seem at times. The Exodus was to be a training ground for occupying the Promise Land. The Lord had a strange new strategy for His people. No one among the Israelites could have foreseen what the next forty years would be like -- not even Moses and Aaron, their leaders. But God proved Himself powerful enough to get the job done.

How does God want to lead us in 2010? No one among us can say! I don't know precisely how God is going to bring new leaders to the church as pastor and youth pastor. I can't say whether this time next year we will still be meeting here at the Nathanael Kirche or whether we will be in a new location. But God has a plan, and He has a strategy to get us to where He wants us to be over the next year. And our God is powerful enough to do just this! Too much indication of this is already clear from His dealings with us over the past year. One phrase stands out in these verses: "The Israelites had done as Moses told them." Moses gave the people God's instructions and the people followed them. That is our challenge today. God is moving in our church in some new directions. That much has become clear, especially to me as your pastor. The question before you today is simply, Are you ready to follow God's leading of this church into a new day? We must obey and we must trust God's leadership, even when we don't yet understand exactly where it is going to take us. I do think that we have been in our "Exodus" preparation period during the past year. My prayer and conviction is that our "Promised Land" is just before us and that God wants to take us into it during the coming months. Are you ready?

III. A New Faith, vv. 40-42.

40 The time that the Israelites had lived in Egypt was four hundred thirty years. 41 At the end of four hundred thirty years, on that very day, all the companies of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. 42 That was for the Lord a night of vigil, to bring them out of the land of Egypt. That same night is a vigil to be kept for the Lord by all the Israelites throughout their generations.

The final verses of this text summarize the narrative. That night the Israelites were full of faith in God

⁷Exod. 14:1-9 (NRSV): 1 Then the Lord said to Moses: 2 Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall camp opposite it, by the sea. 3 Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, "They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them." 4 I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, so that I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord. And they did so. 5 When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the minds of Pharaoh and his officials were changed toward the people, and they said, "What have we done, letting Israel leave our service?" 6 So he had his chariot made ready, and took his army with him; 7 he took six hundred picked chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. 8 The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt and he pursued the Israelites, who were going out boldly. 9 The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, his chariot drivers and his army; they overtook them camped by the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.



along with excitement and hope for the future. With renewed faith in God and His promises they left Egypt headed for a new day with all its possibilities. The sad truth, however, is that this faith didn't last.

When the Egyptian army began closing in on them at the edge of the Sea of Reeds, they became fearful, as Exod. 14:10-14 describes:

10 As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. 11 They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, "Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians"? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." 13 But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. 14 The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still."

They took their eyes off God and put them on the Egyptian armies and the challenge seemed too big for them to handle.

And this would be only the first of several such moments. In the wilderness after the miraculous crossing of the sea, they became thirsty and complained about their situation (Exod. 17:1-3):

1 From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. 2 The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" 3 But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?"

Centuries later the apostle Paul would use this tendency of the Israelites to grumble against God and His leaders in reprimanding the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 10:1-12, NRSV):

1 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 and all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. **6 Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did.** 7 Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." 8 We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9 We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. 10 And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall.

For us to experience all that God wants to do in our midst during 2010 we must have a new faith. That is, we must express a faith that completely trusts God to lead us into a new day. We must be committed to Him and adjust our behavior to match our commitment to a holy, righteous God. In Paul's words, "**we must not desire evil as they did.**"

Today, I challenge each one of you to commit to God and to entrust the future of this church into God's hands. As each one of us commits to serve Him during this coming year, wonderful blessings beyond our imagination will take place. But we can turn aside in complaining and lack of trust in God. When the Israelites did this, they forfeited the possibility of ever entering God's Land of Promise. Should you follow this path, so will you forfeit the opportunity for God's blessings upon your life as well.

CONCLUSION

God has a Bright New Day ahead for the IBC church Cologne, just as He did for the ancient Israelites. Our challenge is to trust God to lead us into that day, and then to obediently serve Him in faithful ministry. Are you ready? Then, let's arise and move into that day!

Hear the words of Hebrews 3:7-13 (NRSV):

7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, as on the day of testing in the wilderness, 9 where your ancestors put me to the test, though they had seen my works 10 for forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and I said, "They always go astray in their hearts, and they have not known my ways.' 11 As in my anger I swore, "They will not enter my rest.' " 12 Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.