

# Curated Meaning

6 September, 2020

Banyule Network of Uniting Churches

**Exodus 12:1-14**

**Psalm 149**

**Romans 13:8-14**

**Matthew 18:15-20**

There is something in each of the Lectionary Bible readings that carries the sense of being on the threshold of change. Exodus says *'This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you.'* The psalm has us *'Sing to the Lord a new song'* and in Romans we are asked the time, *'how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.'* In Matthew a new realm is envisaged; one that is inaugurated in reconciliation. And it begins even though that old empire still exerts its power.

In Melbourne, the season has changed and we find ourselves in the early days of Spring.

But that may not be the biggest change we are experiencing.

In an article about podcasts, in reference to *We're Having a Moment*, Baratunde Thurston is quoted, "What's happening this year is the pandemic has forced us to look at something so many of us could ignore, because there was literally nothing else to look at. They cancelled sports, so we couldn't do that, and we couldn't brunch. So we had to stare into the gaping maw of white supremacy. It's painful and it's shameful.

"COVID-19 is a truth serum. It does not care about the story you've been telling yourself. It doesn't care about your mythology. It will reveal the shambles, the cracks, the crevices, the canyons that exist in your society."

We will never return to February 2020. We are in transition to a new world where we can emerge as pioneers and explorers of a new landscape.

A few weeks ago I wrote about Thomas Kuhn's concept of *paradigm-shift*. It was originally coined in reference to changes in scientific understanding, and now is

more widely used to describe the shifts in our assumptions, our ways of seeing and interpreting, and consequently how we act, as we enter into a new world. It is a handy concept, or tool, that can help move us from being stuck.

A new world is not a novel concept for the people of God. As I have noted above, regarding the Lectionary readings, the tradition of our faith references change and hope in change, repeatedly. The following comment comes from the resources of the Church of Scotland under the title 'Passed Over'.

Have you or someone you know ever been 'passed over for a promotion'? It is an expression that has come to us from the USA, but its meaning is clear enough: those times when in the workplace you experience someone else taking a step upward on the promotion ladder while you remain on the rung below. Passed over. Left behind.

Being passed over has negative connotations, but not in the story from Exodus. In this story, you want to be passed over. In fact you will go to extraordinary lengths to be passed over: smearing the blood of a perfect one-year-old sheep or goat on the doorframe of your home. The alternative for your family doesn't bear thinking about.

This Sunday, however, marks the start of a journey. Here is the story that marks the pivotal moment when a community decides to leave all that it knows behind and seeks a new home. The cost is great for them and for those who are left behind.

This story of the Passover of God, the Pesach in Hebrew, has been kept alive for generation after generation as it is retold in Jewish homes during the festival and holiday associated with Pesach. This is a story that needs to be handled with sensitivity for there is no mistaking the horrifying side of the story. Within the Jewish tradition, the sorrow and grief that surrounds this story is made clear in the choice of foods eaten during the feast: bitter herbs are a part of the feast in memory of the sadness of these events.

Within the story, the Passover marks the culmination of an ongoing struggle between God, through Moses and Aaron, and the Pharaoh over the Hebrew people. The cost of freedom from bondage and slavery is explored with graphic detail. Within the context of Israelite history, where the consecration of

the firstborn was practised and human firstborns were redeemed by sacrifice (as described later in chapter 13), then the added importance of this story to the identity of the Hebrew people as a community. Their freedom was bought through the payment of a heart-wrenching sacrifice by the Egyptians.

What is strikingly different about the instructions for this Passover meal, when compared to what we do today when we share a meal with each other in community, is that we take people's coats from them, perhaps even remove shoes, sit and get comfortable to share time together. Not so for the Passover feast: here you are to keep your coat on, ensure sandals are on and walking stick is to hand. The meal is to be eaten in haste. If it sounds like the drive-thru at your nearby McDonald's then that is not far from the truth. This is a meal that marks the start of a journey. The Hebrews are not going to be settled for a long time, they are a people on the move. How much have we forgotten that the church is also a people on the move? Have we settled and become so comfortable that the thought of moving away from all that we know is too costly to contemplate? What does it mean to be a community on the move? How does your church respond to the changing needs within the community around it?

### **Conversation suggestion:**

In your household,

or in your telephone conversations with others outside your household:

- ❶ Talk about what happens when families or friends get together. Where? When? Who? Food? What are the ways by which you remember and celebrate important times?

### **Activity suggestions;**

- ❶ This is a game that may require some adaptation to our isolation. For example, play it with your household, or on a zoom chat.

Sit in a circle. Begin by saying that you are going on a journey and in your case you are going to pack... then suggest something beginning with the letter 'A'. The next person begins the same: I am going on a journey and I

am going to pack... then they have to remember the previous item and add one beginning with 'B' and so on round the circle using the whole alphabet.

The aim is to start the creative processes of thinking about what you take with you into this emerging new world.

#### ❶ Activity sheet

This was prepared by Caroline Brown with children in a worship setting in mind, but I see no reason why adults and households with children would not be able to adapt it to suit. After all a Wordsearch is an inviting challenge for all ages, and in drawing and colouring all ages are drawn into dimensions beyond straight thought patterns. And Prayer is what all ages are called to do.

### Reflection questions

Which of the suggestions were you able to do?

What helped you to do it?

I wonder, whilst doing it, what were the surprises?

Were you reminded of anything, anyone?

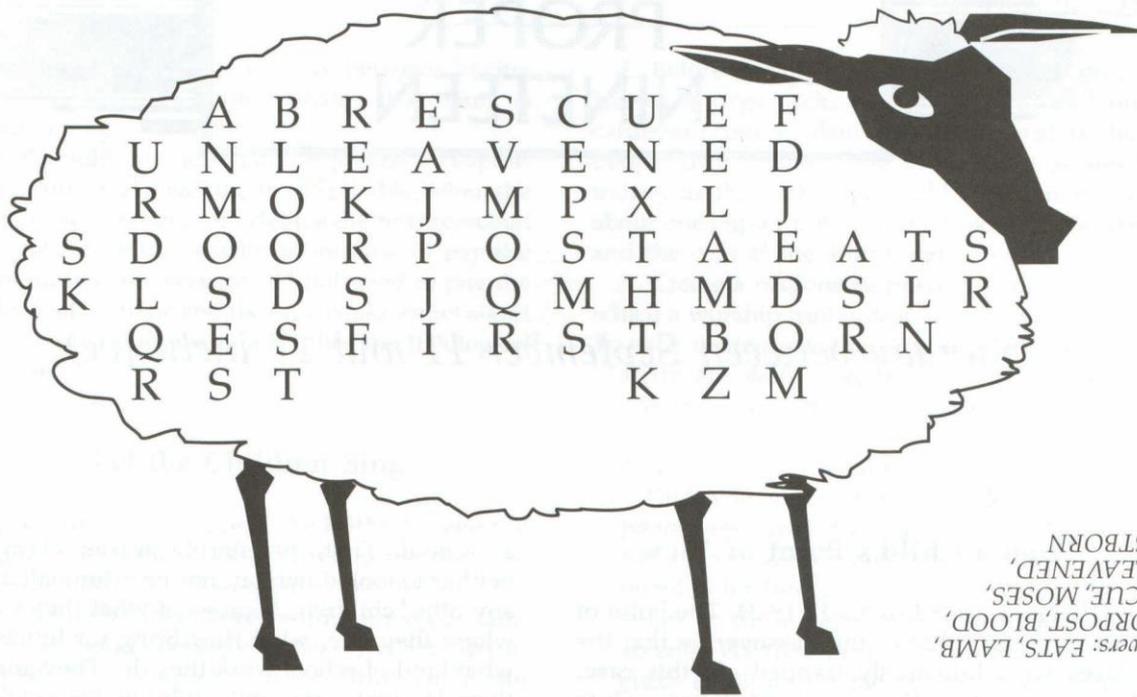
I wonder, were you able to glimpse something of the lenses (paradigms) through which you look at the present times?

Did you recognize some assumptions that you regularly make?

What might God have been communicating to you?

What will you pray about?

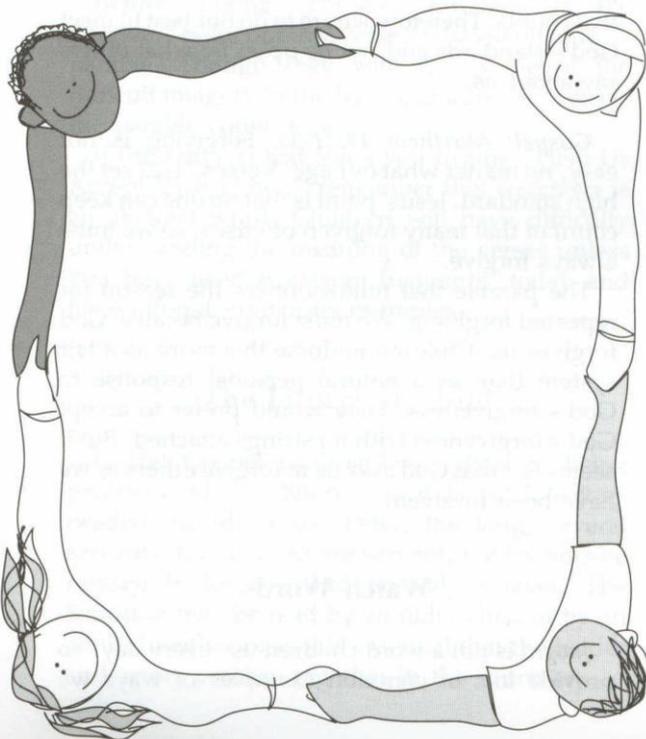
Find 8 Passover words hidden in the lamb.



Answers: EATS, LAMB,  
DOORPOST, BLOOD,  
RESCUE, MOSES,  
UNLEAVENED,  
FIRSTBORN

Draw a picture of people who need to make peace with one another.

Write a prayer for the people you drew.



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