



Sermon, January 15, 2017  
Rev. Dr. Craig S. Pesti-Strobel  
Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

Sermon Series: Where Do We Go from Here?  
"Enslaved"

Opening Question: "What does it mean to be enslaved to something or someone?"

**Scripture: Exodus 1:1-14 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

1 These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: 2 Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, 3 Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, 4 Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. 5 The total number of people born to Jacob was seventy. Joseph was already in Egypt. 6 Then Joseph died, and all his brothers, and that whole generation. 7 But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them. 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.

**Introduction: Why the series**

- The journey we are on
- Meaning of the name, "Exodus:" It is composed of two parts. *Ex* means "out of" or "away from." *òdos* means "road" or "path" or "way." So, the word *Exodus* literally means "the way out," or "exit." Exodus is a story about a journey of this particular group of people *out of* their life in Egypt *into* a new life in a new land as a new people.
- The Bible is full of stories about journeys. This is because our growth as human beings – physically, mentally, psychologically, and spiritually – has the character of a journey, of starting one place and then ending up someplace else. We start as one sort of person

and become a different sort of person. Whole communities of people likewise engage in existential journeys.

- Right now, right here at the opening of this Third Millennium after the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ, we his followers are likewise facing a journey ahead of us. It is a journey out of an old way of life into a new way of life, an old way of doing things into a new way of doing things. We know this is true because everywhere things are changing, constantly changing. Change happens all the time, but when we engage life consciously with God, guided by the Holy Spirit, change becomes *transformation*.
- The story of the people who were the descendants of the “sons of Israel” has a lot to tell us about the transformations that are occurring all around us in our churches, in our culture, and in the nature of our faith itself. This is a tumultuous time. It is a confusing time, and it is a vexing time. Many people are looking at the bigger picture of our contemporary culture and they have a lot to tell us about how the Christian faith is being transformed, and how we can be a part of this transformation. They have a lot to tell us about our own journey here in Coburg and Junction City as communities of faith.

The situation of the Hebrews in Exodus 1:1-14

- Verse 8: “Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.”
- Questions: How far back can you remember? WW2? WW1? Great Depression? Civil War? Revolutionary War?
- 6-800 years passed between the ostensible journeying of the Clans of Israel/Jacob into Egypt to avoid famine and the beginning of the story told in the book of Exodus. Things had changed: Egypt had gone from the 15<sup>th</sup> Dynasty to the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, including a period during which they were ruled by the Hyksos people/kingdom. Of course, “Joseph” was forgotten!

The Hebrews, the tribes and clans of Israel, did not have a strong sense of identity or unique culture.

- Each patriarch had his own clan god. These are the “Els:” *El Shaddai, El Elyon, Elohe Abraham*, and other names such as *The Fear of Jacob* and *the Mighty One of Jacob*. There was not one single name for the god of the Hebrew people. In fact, the “Hebrew” people didn’t have a unique identity at this time. They were simply Semitic slaves. That is what is meant in verse 1 of Exodus 1: “the sons of Israel.” They were simply identified as a clan-based tribal group.
- They were immersed in a highly developed culture, with its own social castes and hierarchies, religious/life outlook, patterns of life.
- These would have tremendous power in shaping the values, outlook and behavior of everyone in Egypt. Let’s take a moment and think about what it means to live for 6-800 years in the midst of a powerful, well-developed, long-lasting civilization. Let’s do this by thinking about our own powerful, well-developed civilization that is only 2-300 year old.

#### Group Reflection Questions:

1. What things have shaped your outlook on life?
2. What do you perceive to be the major influences today on our ways of thinking and behaving?

#### Discussion and Conclusion:

- Exodus is the story of going from one way of life into a different way of life, from one identity into another identity, from one set of gods to another god, from the status of expendable slaves to a self-aware community that attempted to model itself around a new revelation of the nature of God and the universe.
- Our God, the God they came to know through Moses and the prophets and the preachers, is the God of the journey, the God who accompanies us through all the changes in life, and fills those changes with Spirit, thereby causing normal, inevitable change to become transformation. As we face the changes all about us with God at our side, we will be transformed, the church will be transformed, and the world will be transformed. That’s the promise of Exodus.