

**The Rev. Dr. Mary Barber**

**Thanksgiving Day**

**11.27.25**

Happy Thanksgiving! Thanksgiving is a time for gathering together, sharing a big meal, watching football and playing board games. And also, Thanksgiving is a time for telling stories.

We tell stories of Thanksgivings past. That delicious pie grandma used to make. How this relative ate everything as a child, and that one tried to hide food in the mashed potatoes or rice. That uncle who was always late to dinner, the cousin who told the funniest jokes, the aunt who always had great adventures to share. The card game that would always end with your little sister throwing the cards and stomping away.

It seems fitting on this day of stories, we hear in the book of Deuteronomy about the story of the people and God.

God, just like we do, enjoys hearing the story of our relationship with him, and likes to relive it with us on special days. And so the people tell it. A wandering Aramean was my ancestor. He went down into Egypt. We became a great nation. The Egyptians oppressed us and we cried out to the Lord. God freed us and gave us this land.

Now, we Episcopalians, contrary to what they say about us, we know our Bible. And so we know that this story leaves out some things. We know that stuff happened in between that wandering Aramean, Abraham, coming to Egypt, and Pharaoh enslaving the people of Israel.

We know that Abraham first settled in Canaan and had Isaac, and then Isaac had Jacob, who tricked his brother Esau and then went away, married and had seven children. Jacob got a new name, Israel, which would become the name of the people.

One of Jacob's sons, Joseph, ended up back in Egypt, and was the reason the people of Israel were in Egypt for Pharaoh to oppress years later.

And how did Joseph end up in Egypt? Oh yes, it was because his older brothers, who were jealous of him, sold him as a slave to some Ishmaelites.

And wait, why were the Egyptians known as Ishmaelites? Oh yes, because they were descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's first son with his wife Sarah's enslaved Egyptian servant Hagar. Abraham and Sarah made a plan to have children with Hagar as a surrogate wife, but then when Ishmael was born, Sarah wasn't so happy about the whole thing and insisted that Hagar and Ishmael be sent away, back to Egypt.

You're still following all this, right? Well let me summarize. The people of God lived in the promised land, then Egypt, then back to the promised land. They were enslaved, and they also enslaved others and cheated others, even members of their own family.

Does this ruin the whole narrative? Why would the writers of the Bible tell this idealized, rosy summary, but also put in the messy uncomfortable back-story?

We love to tell stories. And we know, from our own families, we know that for every aunt or cousin's story about a Thanksgiving past, there are three other views of that same story from three other family members. We know that the stuff they say about St Paul's and St Martin's is a simplified version, that it does not do justice to the fullness of our communities. And we know that the stories we tell about our country, about that first Thanksgiving or how we came to be the United States, we know these stories are not the whole story either.

If you visit the Museum of the American Revolution or see Ken Burns' latest documentary, you know this. The simple stories leave out uncomfortable things like slavery and taking Indigenous land, they leave out how from the beginning we were a multicultural mix, that people of African descent and Indigenous people have always been active participants in the American story. White, Black, and Indigenous people together fought on both sides of the Revolution, and even within the Patriot side of the war, there was not agreement on what the fight was about or what should be the goal. And this is all a bit messy and just like the Bible, maybe some of us think it just ruins the story. Jesus says something different about all this.

Jesus, early in his ministry, is hungry and being tempted to make himself some bread. He fights that temptation by remembering another piece of scripture from Deuteronomy -- Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Do not work for the bread that perishes, Jesus says in our Gospel today. Do not go for that quick snack, for that simple story. Listen to every one of my words. I am the bread of life.

We, who are all part of the Body of Christ, part of this bread of life, we are a messy funky mixture of flavors. We are a rich and complex array of stories. Our stories endure precisely because they are not simple, they are not bland, they are not empty calories. We have to keep telling our stories because they are layered and complex, because we learn a little more each time, because each time we tell them, we get a little closer to understanding ourselves and this whole Body of Christ.

We will soon say the Eucharistic Prayer. It is a story we tell to God about our relationship with God, about Jesus, God who became human, who is the bread of life. We tell the story, then we eat the bread. Our stories are complicated. Our stories are painful sometimes. And our stories are sacred. Let us keep telling our stories, our story, THE story. Let us keep living into our deepest selves, into being the Body of Christ. St Paul's and St Martin's, you are the Body of Christ. You are the bread of life. Let us listen to the story together, let us eat the bread, and then let us go out, to be bread for the world. Happy Thanksgiving! Amen.