

Has Someone Seen a House Around Here?
Proper 16: The Exodus Project Begins
August 27, 2017
The Rev. Phyllis A. Spiegel

Today is the day of the Diocesan Exodus Project Kick Off. The posters have been up for weeks, the Adult Education team has arranged eager participants into Bible Study groups. And now, in pulpits across the diocese the clergy are all preaching on the Book of Exodus as a call to unity of focus under the bishop's direction. But why? Why has the bishop asked us all to read and to study the Book of Exodus? Why not the Book of James that lays out what a Christian church should be about? Why look at the Old Testament with such unprecedented diocesan focus?

The bishop and an advisory panel of folks from around the diocese feel strongly that the Book of Exodus has the potential to give the churches and people of our diocese a platform for conversation that will lead us as we all seek to understand the role of the church in this time and in our particular places. Terence Fretheim in his commentary on Exodus explains the interesting nature of the Book of Exodus. He asserts that Exodus is a telling of intersecting and emerging stories in which God is present in varied and unfolding ways. God gets right down into the action and so as God acts the people react and likewise as the people act God reacts. God acts in the burning bush, Moses reacts and goes to Pharaoh. Pharaoh does not act as needed for Israel's release and so God reacts to Pharaoh. One facet of God's actions, is that God works in surprising ways, using people of low position rather than through the kings and power players.

In the story we heard this morning, God uses five women to save the baby Moses. Five women supplant the authority of Pharaoh. Such choices on behalf of God play out repeatedly throughout this book - the chief of which being God's call of Moses himself, who stutters and has virtually zero self-confidence to do the job - he did after all kill a man, so that hardly makes him feel like one who should stand up and speak on behalf of God.

And that very concept of worthiness becomes one of our first entry points. Which one of us is "Worthy" to lead people in God's ways? This is kind of the point of us using the book of Exodus, because, as Fretheim

the commentator wrote, we don't want to seek relevance in our own time in this text. This text simply is relevant today and "the task of reading {Exodus} is for that relevance to be seen; the task is to facilitate the urgency of the text as it intersects with ever new lives and situations."¹ God is once again, out in front of us, calling us from our current circumstances.

This idea of finding relevancy in the story of God calling the Israelites out of slavery, of using unexpected, unqualified agents, of being present but not controlling the action, in order to ultimately bring the Israelites to a new home, had me thinking. How is this relevant to our day? What is another story that might illustrate this for us - a sort of parallel story?

As I mulled this over, a rather surprising story came to mind, and when I started to play with the tale a few simple aspects of relevancy between the book of Exodus and our time began to take shape. We are in a time when our nation, the home of America, built on freedom and unity, seems to be getting dismantled. Perhaps we thought it was better made than it actually was. Perhaps it needs to be reassembled. Perhaps, in some ways, the same can be said of the way Christians have gone about living in their Houses of Worship, of the way we are church. Do some things, some ways of being church, need to be dismantled and re-built for this time? While finding one's home being dismantled is most unsettling, is it sometimes necessary or beneficial in the long run?

So here is the story that prompted these questions. And as you listen to this tale that you very likely know well, don't listen to be entertained, but listen for relevancy, for this tale, just like the stories of the Bible has the power to teach us many truths. Seek the urgent relevancy. And now...her is a wonderful tale written by a wise story teller by the name of A. A. Milne.

It was a cold and snowy day when a bear named Pooh left his house to go and find his friend Piglet. Only, quite sadly, to discover that after walking in the snow Piglet did not seem to be home. So Pooh made up a song to keep warm:

The more it snows, *tiddly pom*
The more it goes, *tiddly pom*

¹ Fretheim, Terence E. *Exodus*. Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox Press, 2010; p. 4.

The more it goes, *tiddly pom*
On snowing.

And nobody knows, *tiddly pom*
How cold my toes, *tiddly pom*
How cold my toes, *tiddly pom*
Are growing.

And he sang his song all the way back to his house where he was momentarily confused to see Piglet sitting in a chair by the fire. Establishing that indeed it was Pooh who had been out they decide to have a little snack - or at least Pooh does - before heading out to sing Pooh's snow song to Eeyore.

Piglet as it turns out is not a fan of the snow given how it tends to accumulate behind his ears, and so he begins to suffer as they walk along. To take a minute out of the snow they climb a gate where, after singing the snow song through six times, Pooh has the thought that everyone has a house except for Eeyore and how this part of the forest would be an excellent place for a house. Piglet remembers seeing some sticks on the other side of the forest and so they go to gather them and bring them to this wonderful sheltered place where they lovingly and carefully build a house for their friend.

Meanwhile, later in the afternoon, Eeyore goes to Christopher Robbin's house to inquire as to whether Christopher Robbin might have seen a house. Explaining that probably no one had thought about it since most of them were of very little brain, but if they did think about it they would likely think how it could not be so warm in Eeyore's field about 3 am what with the wind and the snow, not so warm as to be HOT, or to be stuffy per say, and so they would be sorry if he didn't have a house, and so he had built one. Only now it had gone missing, and it wasn't much of a house but it was his house and he was rather fond of it.

At once Christopher Robbin heads out to help Eeyore find his house. When they get to the empty field, Christopher Robbin hears singing and realizes it is Pooh and there is a great reunion of the friends. When they explain to Pooh and Piglet that Eeyore has lost his house, there is some uneasy repeating of information and questions as to whether Eeyore was

quite sure it was a house. Finally Pooh said, “Well...the fact is....It’s like this...” And Piglet said, “It’s like this...only warmer.”
“What’s warmer?” “Where your house is, on the other side of the wood.”

And with that the friends went around to the other side of the wood where Eeyore determined that it was indeed his house, only even better than his house and that the wind must have picked it up and dropped it there. And after lecturing Pooh and Piglet on the merits of Brains first and then Hard Work, he settled into his house and Pooh and Piglet walked back with Christopher Robbin and told him of their Awful Mistake. And when he had finished laughing they all sang the Outdoor Song for Snowy Weather. With Piglet doing the *Tiddly Pomming*. “And I know it seems easy,” Piglet said to himself, “but it isn’t *every one* who could do it.”²

O God, the texts seem to have us asking, have you seen a house around here? Who might you call upon to re-build it? And will you stay with us, O God, as we wander in the wilderness, trying to find our bearings, remembering how to live in covenant with you and with one another?

And so it begins. The Great Exodus Project. A gathering of the people for a time of exploration. May God be with us in ever surprising and unfolding ways.

² Milne, A. A., and Ernest H. Shepard. *The house at Pooh Corner*. London, Egmont, 2016.