The Liberating Word

A Biblical Overview for Progressives

"Wilderness School" (Exodus 16)

The desert loves to strip bare … —Jerome

Recap of Session One, "How We Read the Bible":

1. We do not actually believe <u>in</u> the Bible. We believe in the living <u>God</u> the Bible points us to. Scripture is A LIVING WITNESS to the God who will never be bound by Scripture.
2. We read the Bible in order to see more clearly the glory of God already revealed in creation.

Recap of Session Two, "Beginnings," Genesis 1-9

1. Read through specific lenses: Priority of Scripture; Use of Knowledge; History of Interpretation; Fallibility of Interpretation; Rule of Love.
2. Genesis 1 is *Blessing;* Genesis 2 is *Partnership;* Genesis 3-9 is *The Big Deal Rebellion;* The Rainbow is God's Third Way: ***<u>God decides to mend the entire universe!</u>***

Recap of Session Three, "God Births a People," Exodus 1-15

1. Read through the lens of Liberation Theology: God takes sides in human history, with people trying to survive the cost of injustice. God's holiness is bound up with dismantling exploitive systems. Theology that praises God while ignoring suffering is rejected in this text.
2. The System of Pharaoh's Egypt: Pharaoh at the top as the "son of god." Priesthood and military propping up the system. Royal family, administrators and other "big deals" in the middle. Ordinary citizens below them. Slaves at the bottom living under heavy oppression. Promoted by religious doctrine as the eternal system (Ex 1:8-14). God detests this system (Ex 1:1-3:8).
3. Moses is born into a Women's Resistance Movement: midwives Shiphrah and Puah refuse to cooperate — civil disobedience. Jochebed refuses to let her child disappear. Miriam ensures the baby's survival. Pharaoh's daughter subverts the system and breaks ranks as an ally/accomplice.
4. Song of The Sea (Exodus 15): traditional ancient hymn of praise to a victorious warrior god, most likely composed by Miriam instead of Moses. What do we do with the violence/anticipation of conquest? *Compare with Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, John Brown, Nat Turner, etc.*
5. Additional lenses include: Local Context, Other Context, Use of Knowledge, God-Centered/Re-Interpreted

What Insights have emerged thus far? What has been and continues to be Challenging?

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The Long Way Home, Exodus 13:17, Exodus 15:25

1. Yahweh leads the people into the desert toward the mountain. The prophets will describe desert love as deeper and more honest than any other kind of love. Jesus will follow this paradigm: *Israelites cross the Red Sea into the desert; Jesus is baptized in the Jordan and driven into the desert*
2. Does God lead the people away from the The Way of the Philistines *although* it is faster or *because* it is faster? The Hebrew *ki* can be translated both ways.
3. Desert spirituality describes the wilderness as a liminal place, a threshold between where the people have been and where they are going. It took four days to get out of Egypt. It took forty years to get Egypt out of the people.
4. No water for three days, then only "bitter" water (Marah). But once Moses finds a piece of wood to place in the water, it becomes sweet. God provides what they need, but it looks different than they are used to.
5. And then … OASIS!

The Desert Gives Back, Exodus 16

1. The Wilderness of Sin (pronounced *seen*): the people grumble, wishing they had died in Egypt.
2. ***Lesson One: God Gives Manna for All***: work is the dignified activity of helping God meet the needs of all people; God gives ENOUGH (not too much, not too little)
3. ***Lesson Two: Hoarding Stinks!*:** accumulating more manna than we need and keeping manna from others who need it brings rot, decay and death [Pharaoh's-Egypt Way]
4. ***Lesson Three: The Gift of Sabbath:*** God gives rest so humans can practice full time what life is all about: friendship with God, friendships with others, friendship with nature.

The Desert as Mirror

1. Desert spirituality is the way of the *via negativa* the way of negation or purgation.
2. *Great insights have come to some people only after they reached the point where they had nothing left — **Gary Snyder***
3. The dainty and delicate do not thrive here. The fragile ego loses its props and supporting lines; its incessant need for validation is ignored.
4. The desert's gift is that it can *reject completely the false, formal self, fabricated under social compulsion in the world — **Thomas Merton***

Consider Communion as an Invitation to Manna Society