

Exodus 2:16-20

16 The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. 17 But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defense and watered their flock. 18 When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come back so soon today?" 19 They said, "An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock." 20 He said to his daughters, "Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread" (NRSV).

You are familiar with Exodus, it is about God using Moses to help the Hebrews escape from slavery in Egypt. Pharaoh had issued a decree of genocide ordering that all of the Hebrew boys be thrown into the Nile River to drown. Meanwhile, the mother of Moses mother is brilliant and outsmarts Pharaoh and everyone else. She sets it up for her baby Moses to be found by Pharaoh's daughter who finds him and adopts him. Not only is the life of Moses spared but his own mother gets to raise him as a hired nurse on behalf of Pharaoh's daughter. Then suddenly Moses is grown and we see three scenes where he saves people from suffering injustice. In the first occasion there is an Egyptian that is beating a Hebrew. However, I think it is important to point out that the word used is commonly translated as "kill" - the Egyptian is killing the Hebrew. Moses does to the Egyptian what the Egyptian was doing to the Hebrew slave. The second intervention is when there are two Hebrews fighting amongst themselves and Moses identifies and addresses the one that is wrong. Moses does not scold, judge, or reprimand, anyone, he only intercedes to put a stop to the fighting. The guilty one is not happy with the intervention and challenges Moses authority and he lets it be known that the word is getting out about Moses killing the Egyptian. Moses realizes that he would be sought by Pharaoh as a criminal so he flees for his life and goes to Midian which is obviously a pastoral society since they have a priest there.

Today's Scripture is the third scene where Moses saves people from suffering injustice. The women came to the well to draw water and some shepherds drove them off. Shepherds are to lead their sheep beside the still waters. So, obviously water is scarce in this area since the only source of water is at the well. The actions of Moses are in contrast to the shepherds. He is a man of integrity and defended the women. The word used is commonly translated as "saved" - he saved them. So, before we know of Moses saving the Hebrew people from slavery, there are three separate occasions where he is willing to intervene in order to save people from suffering injustice. The women go home and tell their father, the priest of Midian, about a man that came to their help. Here the word for help is commonly translated as "rescued" - he rescued them from a dangerous situation. The father wants to do something special for the man that rescued his daughters from danger so he extends the invitation to break bread. The father wants to enter into solidarity with Moses. His concern is to offer a chance of hospitality, to extend thanks and honor the man that rescued his daughters from danger. This is the most hospitable thing that he can do. The greatest honor is to be personally invited in to table fellowship with someone's family.

The invitation to break bread dates back to the early portions of the Old Testament. It is a way to thank and honor someone. It is a gathering of peace with people that you love, like, and trust. You welcome them, accept them as who they are, and you want to be with them. We learn in the Old Testament that there is a custom, a tradition, of breaking bread with friends where you

eat at the table of friends and allies that you trust. You welcome them into your house. Breaking bread is the most honorable thing.

The tradition is very important and significant for survival in antiquity. When strangers come into a neighborhood there are rules of conduct so that people know how to deal with other people. When traveling people were cut off from support and so there is the danger that someone may kill you and your family for the resources. In ancient Israel they handled this by the invitation to come and share a meal at your table. To accept the offer of hospitality you join in solidarity with the family. A biblical example of this is when Abraham encountered strangers. It was not known if they meant harm to him and his family. The offer of hospitality will tell so he offered food and drink at his table. Their response told him that they were OK so he told Sarah to prepare a feast.

Then we get to the New Testament and there is Jesus at the table with his disciples. They are gathered around him in an upper room in Jerusalem where they share their last meal together. The goal is to be in solidarity. When they do this, they know the traditions, they know the story of Moses and Abraham, and they know the significance of breaking bread together. Jesus gives the instructions “do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). This is to remember Jesus; the lessons he taught, and the life that he lived. When we gather at the Lord’s Table, we gather together in peace and love. We honor Jesus by accepting his invitation and by extending the invitation of table friendship to everyone. Then we are in solidarity. It is very important to Jesus for us to be in solidarity with one another and with him. That is why he extends the invitation to break bread and that is why the invitation is so important to us.