

Sermon: Telling the Story Text: Exodus 13:1-10 Lent 4 March 11, 2018
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A few weeks ago Keva and I made a quick trip down to Texas where I had the privilege of officiating at my brother's wedding. Texas was warm, at least compared to here in February. And Texans are warm and friendly people.

And things in Texas are big. We stopped at a gas station just south of Austin that is the biggest gas station in the world; 320 cars (or in Texas 320 pickup trucks) can fill up at this station all at once.

The store that was part of the huge gas station was also huge. There was a whole wall with just with varying kinds of jerky. Another wall just for Slurpees. In the store you could buy anything: a whole roasted turkey, a red white and blue stained glass cross marked with the Texas star, boating supplies or even a boat....anything you could imagine you could get there at this gas station. You could live comfortably in this store if you had to...

While in Texas we toured Austin – a thriving, hip, young city- the fastest growing city in the USA - and we visited the Texas hill country and went to beautiful San Antonio. And while in San Antonio we went to the Alamo. It's a huge tourist draw.

Remember the Alamo? Or should I say "Remember the Alamo!" Or maybe do you remember the movie *The Alamo* made by and starring John Wayne?

The Alamo was a church mission that became an armory, built in what is now San Antonio, in what was then the Spanish/Mexican territory of Texas. In 1836 a few hundred Texans occupied the Alamo; the Texans were in revolt and were seeking their freedom from Mexican rule.

The Mexican army brought 1500 soldiers to the Alamo and after a 13 day siege they stormed it and all the Texans inside were killed. But the brave stand by the Texans of the Alamo inspired the Texan rebels elsewhere and the Texans won the next battle, with their battle cry of *Remember the Alamo*, and the territory of Texas won its independence. That's the story. The Alamo is remembered as the place where Texans fought and died for freedom. And that story is told at the Alamo today. In displays, in film, through guides, the story is told as the Texan battle for freedom.

Except there is a story that is not told.

Why did the Texans at the Alamo want their freedom? One of the unspoken reasons was that the Texans wanted the freedom to deny the freedom of their African slaves.

In 1821, Mexico won its independence from Spain and the Texas territory was given to Mexico. In that same year settlers from the American states were allowed to settle in Texas, many coming from southern slave holding states. The more slaves you owned the more land you were given. In 1829 Mexico abolished slavery. But the Texans wanted the freedom to keep their slaves. In the time of the Battle of the Alamo Texans held more than 5000 Africans in slavery. The official story doesn't mention any of this. And while the official history says that all the Texans died in the Alamo fighting for freedom the truth is that one survived. The slave of a

Texas fighter, an African named Joe lived through the battle and was given his freedom by the Mexican army. (Did you know that as many slaves escaped into freedom in Mexico as came to Canada seeking freedom on the Underground Railroad?)

Texas entered the American Union in 1849, bringing 150,000 slaves with them. By the time of the Civil War, and Texas fought for the Confederacy, Texans held 500,000 slaves; slaves made up 1/3 of the Texan population.

Remember the Alamo? It seems there is a lot that is not remembered. There is a story that is not told.

In our first reading today we hear the biblical view of the importance of stories. Moses has led the people of Israel to freedom. They were slaves in Egypt but God brought them out of the land with a mighty hand, through the waters of the red sea toward a land of promise. And even though this was a recent event, Moses urges the people to remember the story. To tell it over and over. And to set aside a day each year to tell the story of how God delivered God's people.

In the Christian tradition we too tell sacred stories. Our church year is built so that we tell the story of salvation Sunday by Sunday over a whole year, year after year.

In Advent we hear of the expectation of Christ's coming. In Christmas we celebrate the birth. In Epiphany we meet the one who came. In Lent we walk with him on the road to the cross. In the Easter season we celebrate Resurrection and then at Pentecost and in the weeks that follow we reflect on the life we live in the Holy Spirit... and then we do it all over again.

And, while we are used to it, we do this peculiar thing every time we gather. We share sacred story. We read from our holy book. The story of God and us is at the center of every Sunday gathering.

Our stories are important, central, grounding, sacred. In a sense, our stories define us.

And then there are the stories we do not tell or have not heard.

In 1986 our denomination, The United Church of Canada apologized to our indigenous sisters and brothers for our historic role in their colonization. The apology read in part: ***We tried to make you be like us and in so doing we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were.***

Part of the indigenous response to our apology was a call to better understand what we were apologizing for...We needed to hear their stories. Hearing their stories would help us to understand more deeply why the apology was needed and would lay the groundwork for a reconciled future

In 1998 we apologized again, this time more specifically for our role in the Residential School system. This apology was a result of our beginning to listen to the as yet untold stories shared by the survivors of the school system.

Then the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was formed in June 2008 and ran for through to the end of 2015. In the TRC we heard stories -nearly 6000 individual stories were heard, that had not been heard, stories of the experience of the residents of the schools. And hearing these stories led to deeper understanding and we hope to action and to change. And the stories that we tell about ourselves change too. The untold story becomes part of told story. And the creation of a new and truer and better story becomes possible.

Our General Council has thought about our denomination making another apology. We are considering offering an apology to the LGBTQ community in our midst. Historically the Christian church has demonized this community, called them aberrant, especially sinful, an abomination...

But before we can apologize, the Affirm community in our church asked that we listen to stories, stories untold. Stories of that speak to the LGBTQ2 experience of church.

These stories are being collected through The Living Apology project, also called Iridesce. In the most recent issue of the Observer we can read this:

"One church member shared his story from the early '80s when he was starting to become aware of his sexuality. "The side opposing gay inclusion was so strong. If you disagreed, you were attacked verbally and emotionally," he told Iridesce. "These were extremely difficult things to listen to." When his congregation learned he was gay, "church became a very unsafe environment. . . . I was being judged. I felt totally alienated. When I went to church on Sunday morning, no one would speak with me." He and his entire family had to leave the congregation.

Next Sunday we will have Aaron Miechkota with us in worship. Aaron is the project leader for Iridesce. She will help us to hear the stories that we have not heard.

In the Observer we read this about Aaron and Iridesce:

Miechkota says that there is indeed a narrative of LGBTQ welcome that we like to tell ourselves and share with the broader community. Through the stories of Iridesce, she says it's emerging as "an early trend" that the welcome we assume we offer may not line up with the realities experienced by LGBTQ people in our church today. "Maybe we're not as far along as we think we are," she says.

So we need to share the as yet untold stories. And hearing those stories might help us to create a more honest story about who we are, a better story together as we move into God's future together.