

Shabbat 04 12 19 Sermon

As I mentioned earlier in the evening, the Shabbat is known as Shabbat HaGadol, this is the Great Shabbat. The Big Shabbat, the Shabbat that is Gadol, means great. And its name, the Great Shabbat, is mysterious to us. We don't really know where it comes from, so we have, whenever we have a mystery, we have a lot of efforts to name it. So, I think the most popular reasoning behind it being called the Great Sabbath was because, at least early on, rabbis would give, not every week, a sermon. A sermon didn't happen every week.

There was two great sermons a year, and one of them was called the Great Sermon because it went on for a really long time, unlike tonight. And so they wound up calling it the Great Sabbath because of the length of the rabbi's oration. There are two other reasons given for the name Shabbat HaGadol, and I want to make an effort over the next ten minutes to connect these two reasons for Shabbat HaGadol and connect it also into a week from tonight when many of us, I hope all of us, will be sitting together, God bless you, in a seder, participating in the seder, in the rite of passage that is that evening.

The two other reasons for Shabbat HaGadol brought in the sources is, number two, because on this Sabbath, tomorrow morning in synagogues around the world and in temples around the world, for at least 2,000 years, we have read from the prophecy of the prophet named Malachi, or Malachi. And at the end of Malachi, or Malachi's prophecy, he sees a future world. He says, הנה אנכי שולח את עליה הנביא, I will send a prophet named Elijah the prophet. At the end of days, לפני ביום ה, before the arrival of the great day of God, HaGadol VeHanara, the great day. And on that day, the prophet Malachi says that Elijah the prophet will bring the hearts of children back to the hearts of their parents and the hearts of parents back to the hearts of their children. There will be a reunion between generations. That day is called the great day. The Yom HaGadol.

And so the second theory says Shabbat HaGadol, the great Shabbat, borrows its name from that word Gadol, the great day, the utopic day, the future when parents and children, when generations will reunite. And the third theory for Shabbat HaGadol, amongst others, but just the third one for tonight, is that this great day doesn't borrow a name, but commemorates an event, an action taken by the Israelites. And if you can imagine for a moment here, not just Friday night here in New York City, but in ancient Egypt, a group of slaves sitting around being told by their leader Moses, on the 10th of the month, you are to grab a god of Egypt, known as a lamb, and bring it into your homes. And it will be in your homes for four days. The god of Egypt will be brought into your homes, tied to the bedpost. And the theory about Shabbat HaGadol says that that 10th of Nisan, that year, the 10th day of the month of Nisan, four days before they were to slaughter that Paschal offering, that it became known as the Paschal offering, that date, the 10th of Nisan, in that year, was a Shabbat.

And to commemorate the miracle of those who acted with civil disobedience against the power structures that were at the time, we commemorate this day, tonight and tomorrow, as the great Sabbath, to commemorate and memorialize that act of courage, of fearlessness against an oppressor. They took a stand and they brought the Paschal lamb in for all time. There's something in these two theories, not the one about a long sermon, but the one about the vision of parents and children and children and parents and the powerful act of

civil disobedience of those who brought the god of Egypt into their home. Something profound, something important about the Passover Seder and about what I think we're doing on Passover itself. That word, Passover, if you think about it, it's odd. First of all, it's not one word. Passover is not one word. Sorry, Pass over. Pass under, pass over, pass forward, pass back, pass word, pass or by, pass the buck, get a pass, receive a pass, free pass, get a pass, go home free, pass. I feel like George Carlin all of a sudden, right? It's a weird word. It's a weird word. It means at once to both get a pass is for something to be ignored. I give you a pass, I'm going to ignore it.

And that's actually the functional usage in the Torah for the Paschal lamb. How does the Paschal lamb get its name, right? That lamb that was brought in as an act of civil disobedience. That lamb's name, it's not defining the act of the Israelites, it defines whose act, who passed over, who ignored the homes of the Israelites. God. The word passover has nothing to do with the Israelites or the lamb for that matter in a moment. The lamb only represents pass over in that it was the necessary prerequisite for God to passover.

Listen to this. The Torah describes that at one point in the future your children will ask you questions. Wow, interesting, okay. This actually forms the Seder structure. Children ask questions. They'll ask you a question and you will say, This is, this lamb that was the God of Egypt became the Paschal Zevach, the Paschal offering for God. This little lamb represents a passing over. It has its name from God's willingness not to be attentive but to ignore. God was willing because of this lamb to give us a free pass and passed over. But for the Israelites who are the ones sacrificing the lamb, nothing of the lamb has to do with passing over and ignoring, does it? Everything about the lamb has to do with passing through. Everything about the lamb as it relates to the Israelites has nothing to do with jumping over but walking through.

They are to take the God of Egypt after four days of familiarity. They are to take the fear, the object of veneration and of terror and they are to bring it close. Step one. Step two, they are to get to know it for four days and be terrified that maybe, maybe somebody might discover them. It's hidden. And after four days of hiddenness, they are to do the act that you can possibly imagine for them. It might be a little bit scary. They are to courageously overcome their fear so that they might what? Take the blood of that animal, that God, and put it all over their doorpost where they don't jump over. They don't skip over. They walk through. What was passing over for God was passing through for humans. If the way to liberation was to imagine a God who would ignore for the sake of liberation our homes but not the others' homes, the God of liberation in our text says to those who want to be free, I will pass over but you must pass through. You must pass through.

You ever think to yourself, why do we have to have this ritual? After all, God brought ten plagues on the Egyptians in our myth. The whole story is ridiculous. We're about to leave Egypt and God knows where we live. God knows where we live, I hope. A God that can make the Nile into blood and bring locusts and know where the firstborns of Egypt are but with us, God had to see something. God had to see something. For God to pass over, we had to be willing to pass through. We had to be willing to bring the thing that was scariest, the thing that we could have submerged our terror. We could have just left Egypt. But God said, no, you know something? There's a little bit of shadow. There's a little bit of something

hidden that needs to be revealed because in order for you to be free, you're going to be passing through because if you pass over, it will come back. Whatever you will not face will come back to bite you in your tuchus. That which is concealed, that which is secretive, that which is held at bay, that which is I don't want to look at that. That thing which we say we can avoid and do the dance of avoidance.

The liberation story says if you want to be free, you will be required to have the courage to let the submerged emerge, to let the past over rise up so you might pass through it, with it, around it, for your freedom. The hidden must be revealed. That which has been left behind must be brought forward. That which has been forgotten must be remembered if we are to be free. And if that's true of me and you and everyone in this room, it is true of a culture, it is true of a society, it is true of a nation, it is true that we will not be free until we pass through that place that we would probably wish we could just get a pass on. It doesn't work like that. And you know who knows this better than anyone? You know who knows this better than anyone? Our kids. Our children. Our next generation. Our leaders who have not become inured to the ignoring of facts, to the partial way that we live in the world. Our kids demand more of us. Our kids demand us to get to the bottom of it, to be honest, to be true, to be transparent. Tell me the truth, mom and dad. Tell me the truth, politicians. Tell me the truth.

So it isn't a mystery to me that we begin our Seder. The very same kids who are going to ask the questions in order to give them something to think about. We take the matzah at the beginning of our rite of passage. The very matzah which we are told by the rabbis is representative of the paschal offering. The middle of the three matzahs. And we do what with it, everybody? We take it and we break it. And then what do we do, everyone? We hide the bigger piece. We hide the bigger piece. If you've never been to a Seder, somebody here, raise your hand if you're going to invite somebody who's never been to a Seder. Raise your hand. Somebody who's never been to a Seder, you're going to go to a Seder. And at that Seder, at that rite, there's going to be a moment where this big matzah is broken and the big piece is going to be wrapped in a napkin. And then it's going to be hidden. And who's going to look for it? The kids. Because the kids won't let us forget. The kids won't let us move on.

The next generation will say, you know what, if you want reconciliation on that great day, Yom Ha'gadol V'ha'norah, that great Elijah who will come and reconcile parents and children, children and parents, next generation politicians and last generation politicians, those who have been cynical and despaired and those who are seeing hope, those who want to bring that gap together, they'll say, you know what, we're still looking for that matzah. You can't hide it because we're going to find it. In fact, we won't be free until we eat that Paschal matzah, that Afikoman. And then we'll ask you for a gift.

The Great Sabbath is the Great Sabbath because it asks us to ask each other next Friday night and next Saturday night or whenever you have a Seder, what is it that I need to know to do? What do I need to pass through this Passover? What is it that keeps me from passing through this Passover? What are the fears? What are the inhibitions? What are the places that are dark or hidden that I don't want to look at that inhibit my passing through this Passover? This Great Sabbath brings together parents and children, children and parents in Yom Ha'Gadol and this Great Sabbath brings together those who are acting fearlessly,

confronting fears and slaughtering the gods that have no power over us as a method for moving through.

Don't pass over this Passover. Pass through. Don't pass over climate change, this Passover. Don't pass over the shoelaces of 9,800 refugees as they are stripped of their dignity daily at the border because God forbid, we need their shoelaces to keep us safe in our homes. Don't pass over the belts that are confiscated so that refugees, human beings, made in God's image, walk around with their pants falling down and their shoes coming off their feet. Don't pass over, don't pass over the danger of right-wing extremism in our homeland that now will be in the Knesset but needs awareness and love and fastidiousness so that we might build a world in our homeland that is for all of its people. Don't pass over. We won't be free until we pass through.

May the God who gave us the courage to draw fearful lambs into our living rooms and bedrooms give us the courage to find the hidden matzah, the one that most adults stop looking for around the age of who knows when, and to bring kids together with parents, parents together with the kids, raise children next generation with the future, with the past, so that we might reconcile together and join hands in creating a world, creating a world where no one gets a free pass on passing through, but that together, collectively, with each other's support and help, we might build a world where we can pass through to the other side.

Please rise.