

The author of the Gospel of John presents Jesus as dying on the Day of Preparation—it's part of his image of Christ as the passover lamb.

I've always loved the Haggadah, the liturgy of the Jewish Passover meal, but each year my appreciation of it deepens. The Haggadah instructs participants to say—in the first person—"A wandering Aramean was my ancestor," from the 26th chapter of Deuteronomy—which we read not long ago. This story is recounted to remind everyone of the exodus out of Egypt, as God led his people from "the narrow place", to the place God would show them.

The Haggadah goes on: participants are to say, again in the first person, "When we were slaves in Egypt.." This reminds us that when humanity sees power merely as domination, when humanity treats difference as a reason to subjugate the "other"—God raises up a prophet to say, "Enough,". That prophet will lead us out of the narrow places of our world, into lands of promise-- where we will be freed to become God's people, and to treat one another as God treats us.

Sometimes we are good at following God into the land of promise, and sometimes the lure of what we know is too strong. We elect to stay and deal with the devil we know, rather than the hope we can hardly imagine.

We become stuck in mitzrayim- narrow places-- of our own making.

We become slaves of our own fear. And we sometimes even breed that fear among peoples, nations. We enslave people captured in foreign lands, we raise internment camps for people of different ethnicities during wartime, and people are even today

enslaved by poverty, debt, and prejudice. Slavery comes in many legal and subtle forms.

We protect ourselves from death by killing, protect ourselves from violence with more guns, we protect ourselves from pain by wounding others.

And amidst our reasonable violence and fantasized and practiced revenge, often in the name of Jesus, God said, “THAT’S ENOUGH. Never again. ”

So there is good news on this Good Friday, in this dark and narrow place. Our mitzrayim. And the cross is a dark place. The Roman culture that invented the Cross was known for its ingenuity in making use of simple and natural forms for torture.

It’s easy. Just take heavy posts, and set them along the busy roads into the city. Set brackets in them to receive a horizontal beam. Tie—or nail—a person’s hands to the beam, set that beam across the pole in the brackets, and you have an excruciating form of torture and slow death that takes little time or effort to begin, but days to finish.

Rulers like Pontius Pilate didn’t hesitate to use it. It was diabolically simple, cost-effective and highly visible as a public deterrent to those who would oppose the might of empire.

During Passover season, as Jerusalem became clogged with pilgrims remembering how their God liberates slaves from their oppressors, Pilate lined the roads with hundreds of crosses, each filled with a living reminder of how narrow and dark a prison we can make using our imaginations—as we set about hurting others.

In the person of Jesus, God came to that dark and narrow place.

Jesus' arms, stretched out on the cross, God showed us the wideness of God's mercy. The most powerful being in all Creation became powerless for our sake. The only person who could rightly be called "lord" or "king" on this earth, took upon himself the treatment humankind deals to oppressed people.

The "judge of the nations" was stripped naked—no loincloth to cover him—and set to suffer anonymously among the hundreds of anonymous and disgraced men, violated with a shameful death.

Sometimes we hear others say: "God will not be mocked!" But Jesus, God made flesh, was mocked, and humiliated, and tortured, and murdered—and on that dark day said, finally, for all time—"That's enough. Never again. It is FINISHED."

This is a dark, narrow place we visit today. But we need to be here. We need to visit these *mitzrayim*. We need to open our hearts not only to the hungry, the homeless, and the oppressed, but to the contemptuous, the persecutors, the oppressors.

The dark places in our own hearts are populated by all of these. We scorn and despise and persecute and try to kill what we most fear in ourselves.

It can feel hopeless when we confront our own dark and narrow spaces—but Jesus put an end to that. To acknowledge the ways in which we hurt each other—is often ENOUGH.

There is freedom for both slaves and enslavers alike through the one who became a slave to all. All scores were settled in the refusal of this one man to settle the score.

It was finished, not with a decisive blow at this tormentors to put them to shame, but with words of healing, of reconciliation. Jesus, mocked and dying, brought back together the human family with his last breath. The power of that act has never been equaled,

because Jesus' power is not like the power of worldly rulers, worldly kings. Jesus spoke truly when he told Pilate his kingdom was not of this world.

There's a wideness in God's mercy, as we discover in the midst of our own mitzrayim. The darkness and fear--the pain of death itself-- have all been cast out. IT IS FINISHED.

Enslaving ourselves and others to blind ambition and retributive justice because of our narrowness of heart: IT IS FINISHED.

The God of the universe has proclaimed definitely, for all time: Enough bloodshed. Enough shame. Enough lack of care. Enough suffering. IT MUST BE FINISHED.

And we are free. Free to love, free to serve, freed from every system and every habit that makes us, those we love, and our whole world—suffer.

It is finished—all of it—and we are free to claim the vision of a world made new: to see the immeasurable wideness of God's mercy.

Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Amen.