**Souvenirs for a Hopeful Journey**

Some of you know that Lans and I are getting ready to move to a smaller house in Breda-- with a smaller garden. goodbye lawnmower!

The move is actually going to happen in April. But we’re getting ready now. And since we have lived in our current house for about 17 years, we have collected a lot of stuff to sort through. Maybe I’m the only one, but sometimes you just don't know what to do with it all. Is it worth keeping? This reindeer is a relic from Lans’ youth. When on a trip to Norway with his parents, he got this in exchange for his promise “to always, always be a VERY good boy”... It turns out that some souvenirs are more valuable than others. But it’s not always obvious to an outsider what the value is of an object. Some things are special because they mark certain events, or happenings, like this reindeer.

Did you know the Bible also describes people bringing home souvenirs from trips? The Bible is full of interesting things!

Today we will also look at an Old Testament story. For context, first we’ll do a quick overview of the story of the Exodus. Then we will see how it points forward to Jesus.

Early in the bible we are told a story about God forming a friendship with a man named Abraham. God promised Abraham that he would create a whole new people through him. This people would be called God’s own people, and God promised that he would bless the world through them. (Genesis 12: 1-3). Well, Abraham did have descendants—and they ended up in Egypt. Difficult to know how many in total; some scriptures say about 600,000 men. Add women and children to that… Egypt, though, was not the land promised to Abraham. OH, and I forgot to mention\ the people became slaves in Egypt. In the story of Exodus, God partners with Moses to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt into freedom. That doesn’t go really easily. The people complain a lot and don’t listen to God or Moses. After some 40 years in the desert, God brings the younger generation into the Promised Land. Unfortunately, that doesn’t go as well as it should have: the people keep doubting, complaining and disobeying. In other words, they had a taste of freedom but wasted it.

There’s a moment in the exodus story that stands out to me, when the Israelites have been led miraculously out of Egypt. They disobeyed God and ended up wandering in the desert for 40 years, but at a certain point they are finally ready to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land. The priests with the ark lead the way, stepping into the water, flowing at full speed. When they step in, the water miraculously parts… and the people cross, with fighting men in the lead. I read some estimates including women and children of around 2 million people.

With the hated desert behind them, and the Promised Land now in front of them, what do they do? Fighting men, onward to conquer... Or not?

**Not**. You see, God gave a special instruction to Joshua: the people first needed to gather 12 big rocks from the middle of the river (it's still dry ground while the priests holding the ark are standing in the middle.. And they stand there until everyone is across). One representative of each tribe is to take his rock out of the river. The 12 rocks would then be carried to the campsite and arranged together to create a memorial of what God has done for them. What do these stones mean?

Joshua 4:20-23.

...

*20 And those twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal.*

*21 Then he spoke to the children of Israel, saying: "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stones?'*

*22 "then you shall let your children know, saying, 'Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land';*

*23 "for the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over,*

*20 Jozua richtte daar de twaalf stenen op die ze uit de Jordaan hadden meegenomen. 21 Hij zei tegen de Israëlieten: “Wanneer uw kinderen later vragen wat deze stenen betekenen, 22 dan moet u hun het volgende vertellen: “Israël is de Jordaan overgetrokken, en wel over de droge bedding. 23 Want de Heer, jullie God, heeft de Jordaan voor jullie drooggelegd totdat jullie waren overgetrokken, zoals hij ook de Rietzee voor ons heeft drooggelegd totdat we die waren overgetrokken…”*

So what were these stones? The Israelites were meant to keep on remembering that God took care of them during that time. And he didn’t just barely take care of them… he did it in a big way. The riverbed was dry, not muddy. A thriving river just dried up in front of them. God was among them to take care of them. These stones come from the deepest part of the river. I think that God takes us through deep waters sometimes, on the way to freedom.

I noticed a couple more things here. Do you notice the hope for the future generations? “Children will ask their fathers in times to come…” God is talking here about a thriving nation with a great future ahead. You also see here the important community aspect of remembering—not just outcomes, but also stories. The Israelites were told to remember many things together—many psalms are full of stories being recalled to build up faith. A few weeks ago Sandra shared her witness. We share her joy in God’s faithfulness. Zoe recently wrote the column in the news bulletin. These stories are beautiful, not because any of us has arrived, but because the stories take us with Sandra and Zoe in their journeys of trusting God.

There’s one more thing God adds to this instruction, in verse 24

*24 "that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever."*

*24 “…Want alle volken op aarde moeten weten hoe machtig de Heer, jullie God, is, en jullie moeten altijd vol ontzag voor hem zijn”*

Remembering this moment, in other words, will fill you with awe and deep respect for God. When people see you remembering this moment they will see how great your God is. You’re not trying to cover up your brokenness, you are just being “one thirsty man telling another one where to find water.”

At the campsite, they stack these rocks. And they name the place Gilgal, which means wheel. Why do I think that is important?

*5:9 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal to this day. 10 Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho.*

*5:9 En de Heer zei tegen Jozua: ‘Vandaag heb ik de schande van Egypte van jullie afgewenteld,’ en Jozua noemde die plaats Gilgal. Zo heet die plaats tot op de dag van vandaag. 10 Toen de Israëlieten in hun kamp bij Gilgal waren, op de vlakte van Jericho, bereidden ze in de avond van de veertiende dag van die eerste maand het Pesachoffer.*

The reproach of Egypt-- the stain of slavery. God has rolled it away from them. We cannot remove our own sin and shame. We can hide, we can live in denial, but it is a stone impossible for us to shift for ourselves. Let's bring Jesus into the picture. When was another stone rolled away at Passover?

God rolled the stone away. Jesus’ grave had a stone rolled in front of it. Why couldn’t it just be unrolled? Why did that have to be God who unrolled it? I read that such stones were rolled into a deep ditch were it was very difficult to just roll it out. Jesus tomb was also sealed by the Romans and guarded. Getting it open was truly not done by man.

So there's a precious souvenir for you: Jesus died during the Passover celebration-- the yearly feast when the Israelites remembered the exodus. Every year they still celebrate God's move to set them free. Pass over means that God passed over -- saved-- the houses that had the blood of a perfect lamb smeared on the door posts. And there is Jesus, the Lamb of God, shedding his blood on that Passover to remove our shame, to bring us life.

What does Jesus himself say about his own upcoming sacrifice? On the evening Jesus sat at the last supper with the disciples he said, remember me until I come back. As often as you do this, drink this wine, eat this bread, you do remember me. Remember how I gave myself for you-- because I love you… Do this, it's good for you. Keep in mind that I'm coming back to bring you home.

Communion is a kind of souvenir-- a habit Jesus has given us to remind us of something bigger that we must not lose sight of. True remembrance needs an outlet. You see the May 4/5th celebrations in Holland. It’s beautiful, and necessary—or we would forget.

(Story)

My Aebelskiver pan reminds me of something I don’t want to lose sight of: I went through deep waters when I was about 18 years old. Californian, second trip with dear friend to Europe.. once at 16: great. At 18: very different from the start. Grown apart, two boys, other interests, decision to leave with backpack, train ticket for another month, and a ticket for a flight home. After a week of traveling, meeting people but still lonely, arrived in DK. Poster, meetings, Christian fellowship, two girls, the pan. So this pan reminds me of God's faithfulness. That he had his eye on me in the midst of that painful rejection and loneliness. He met me with abundance.

**Everyone has an aebelskiver story.**

A Souvenir triggers our memories. We see it and say, ‘What a great trip’, ‘how close we were’, ‘what fun’. Or, ‘how difficult, but we came through together’...

Today I’ve defined the word souvenir in a really broad sense—as a tool God gives us to help us to remember. Does a souvenir have to be a material thing? Not at all, but there's nothing wrong with a material thing, if you can give God thanks for it. That's one way I test things for myself. And God has put us in a physical world, and filled it with beauty for us to see-- to point us to him. There are many kinds of spiritual souvenirs. The Lord’s Supper I mentioned already. There are also daily habits: Giving thanks and praising God help us remember what God is doing and has done for us.

But in this busy world it can be a challenge to take the time to remember. For the do-ers like myself, we just want to move along…get there, go swimming. But I’m convinced that the ***act of remembering*** has great value. I’ve talked about a lot of things this morning. Here is a brief summary.

**First, it builds community.**

It’s good to tell our stories and to listen to others. (COMMUNITY)

**Second, it keeps God on our radar,**

Remembering is valuable because it is a practical outlet, to remind us of God’s goodness, especially in the busy times of life. (RADAR)

**Third**, **it sets our identity.**

Remembering is valuable because it helps us focus on God’s love for us and our new identity We are beloved children of a Loving heavenly Father. -- so we know we are not alone in current circumstances. (IDENTITY: beloved)

**Fourth**, **it makes us brave**.

Remembering is valuable because it helps us live in the present moment with God. We can rejoice in the present moment, even if it is difficult. There’s a saying that ‘Jesus has taken care of our past and our future so we can live in the present’. (BRAVERY)

**Fifth**, **it helps us live in His rest and peace**.

Remembering is valuable because it puts us in the right position with God. He has helped us/loves us. We receive from him. We don’t have to hustle for ourselves, wear ourselves out ‘making it happen’. (REST and PEACE)

**Sixth**, **it gives us fresh hope.**

Remembering is valuable because we never stop learning from Gods faithfulness in our lives. We can keep learning from his past faithfulness and to be encouraged by the goodness that others experience. (HOPEFUL JOURNEY)

**Seventh**, **it’s a way to shine in the world.**

You’re not trying to hide your humanness or cover up your brokenness. You're just “one thirsty man telling another one where to find water.” (WITNESS)

Huisgroepen:

1. Sommigen willen misschien hun eigen ‘aebelskiver’ verhaal kort delen: wat heb je daaraan in het heden?
2. Using the list of seven things above, look at the tekst of the disciples walking to Emmaus: luke 24:13-35. What helped the disciples recognize Jesus? What was the result (v32,36,41,45)? Can you add other things to the list of seven benefits you get when you actively remember the great things God has done for you?
3. Voor extra (zelf)studie, zouden jullie over de volgende stuk kunnen praten:

In the sermon last week Henk talked about how the whole nation was taken into captivity and shipped away—he described some of the problems they had when they returned to Israel. In the middle of all that sorrow, God promised through the prophets that He would one day restore his people—and all people. He could do something to change the human heart. In Ezekiel 11:29 God says that -- in exchange for their heart of stone—he will give people a heart of flesh--- and a new spirit.

*Ezekiel 11:19 I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.*

----🡪 In what respects do you think that this story (From God calling Abraham, through the exodus and the promised land…) points forward to what God is doing with people in all of history? How has Jesus brought fulfilment? What is the Holy Spirit’s role in helping us live today in that freedom?

