

**Sermon for Evensong at St Mawes Church by the Reverend Arwen Folkes**  
**Exodus 24**  
**30th September 2018**

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

When the Jewish rabbis teach on the book of Exodus they say that there is 'no earlier or later' in the Torah. This quote from the Jewish tradition comes from the idea that the Book of Exodus, and in particular the making of a covenant between God and God's people is a timeless thing. It doesn't only rest in the past, doesn't only exist in the present, nor does it belong solely to the future. God's covenant and the bond it created with the people of the Book of Exodus is as much now, as it was then, and as it will be.

But, this rightly leads us to the question ... How is this covenant, this promised relationship between us and God, realised by us in this place on this evening?

The Exodus 24 narrative includes three key movements and I believe we can find their parallels as we gather here this evening for Evensong. We are, right here, living a 'now' of the covenant and we may not even realise it.

First there is the idea of sacrifice by which people draw into the holy place and presence of God. Second there is the idea of community, of sharing with one another, and third there is the idea of transcendence. These are the three movements we hear of in Exodus 24.

In Exodus all the talk about blood and sacrifice can make the text feel as though it only belongs in the dark ages. But the idea of blood is to be understood as the life force, the thing that brings and sustains life. An essential aspect of being alive and therefore symbolic of the gift of life that the Exodus people want to give back to God.

The gift of life is not just known by blood though. There is another essential aspect to being biologically alive and is perhaps easier to speak about: Breath. Our breathing is essential to our existence. It is the breath of God that ensouls our lives. It is the breath of a baby that reassures the new parents that all is well. It is the last breath that signifies our ending. Breath then, is equal to the symbolism of blood, as indicative of the gift of life.

This evening then, we do not make a sacrifice with our blood, but we do make a form of sacrifice with our breath. There are the puffs and pants to get up this hill for one thing! But then there is the use of our breath in singing and in the beautiful chorus sung, right here in front of the altar. We could have just sat at home this evening, breathing alone as we watched the Antiques Roadshow, but instead we have brought our breath, our life force, and we use it here in this holy place.

We have sacrificed our breath for an hour at the altar of God which is wholly resonant with the Exodus teaching and shows that here we have made the very first step of fulfilling the covenant with God.

Now, some people listen to Evensong on the radio. Radio Three is very good at airing some of the most beautiful services from the magnificent chapels of our country. Who knows, after this evening, St Mawes Church and the Roseland Churches Choir could be a

contender! But, is it possible to sit at home listening to Evensong by oneself and be faithful to the covenant described in Exodus?

Well, quite probably not. Because the second part of this covenant is in our companionship here with one another. In Exodus the elders and the children gathered together to eat. We are the community of God's people in this place and in bringing ourselves to be here, we are living out the second part of the covenant. We are together as the book is read to the audience of the people. With one another, and with our breath, we are guided to hear the voice of God in our midst.

We particularly recognise on this Harvest Sunday, our belonging as a people within God's creation. In singing and praying as one, we are fulfilling the second part of the covenant made with Moses. God has called us as a people, not as a person. We are the present day people of the book, playing our part in the second step of making sure that God's covenant is remembered. The choir lead us with their own union of voices, their own harmonies and resonances. Their singing is a perfect metaphor for the way in which our individual lives are bound into one in this place, in all our diversity, as a group of Covenant people.

So with sacrifice and gathering both accomplished in this place as it was in the Exodus. What happens next?

Just like Moses, God says to us 'come up to me into the mount, and be there'. Here in this church, up this high hill, on this dusky night are invited into a glimpse of transcendence. It may be found in the still holiness of this place, it may be found in the uplifting of our senses in beautiful song, or it may be found in the fellowship of prayer with one another. But we are invited to climb up that hill, to see the light of God gifted within the covenant relationship with him and one another.

We are at one, through space and time, with the people of the Exodus. And without even knowing it, we are here fulfilling what the covenant of God asks us to do so. The hope of being partakers of this promise and the hope of entering such a holy place and being lifted by such holy voices, is that our breath be transformed to share that holiness with the world around us, knowing that the transcendent promise of God is freely given to those who are willing to offer their time and breath and to those who are willing to pray with one another.

May we, like Moses, like all the people gathered in the story of Exodus, leave this place knowing that, we have followed in the faithful pattern of our forefathers and foremothers and been invited to enter into God's midst, right here and right now.

Amen