

Women's Gathering 2017
FORUM: God's People Inside and Out: Biblical Inspiration for Identity and Mission
Rev. Dr. Patricia Dutcher-Walls

Rooted in love “inside” identity: the people of God, landless slaves saved and made a people by God's grace to be a covenant community

Exodus 6: 2-8

²God also spoke to Moses and said to him: ‘I am the LORD. ³I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty ... ⁴I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens. ⁵I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. ⁶Say therefore to the Israelites, “I am the LORD, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement. ⁷I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. ⁸I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.”

Exodus 20:1-2

¹Then God spoke all these words: ²I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³you shall have no other gods before me.

Lev 19:1-2, 18

¹The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ²Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. ¹⁸You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Deut 6:4-5

⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

The “insiders”: basic social unit of the covenant people: the ancestral household: wives, children, unmarried adult daughters, married sons and their wives, and servants; ancestral agricultural land and animals, all related to male head of family—their social, religious and economic central identity

Numbers 1:1-3

¹The LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: ²Take a census of the whole congregation of Israelites, in their clans, by ancestral houses, according to the number of names, every male individually; ³from twenty years old and upwards.

Joshua 7:16-24 (excerpts)

¹⁶So Joshua rose early in the morning, and brought Israel near tribe by tribe, and the tribe of Judah was taken. ¹⁷He brought near the clans of Judah, and the clan of the Zerahites was taken; and he brought near the clan of the Zerahites, family by family, and Zabdi was taken. ¹⁸And he brought

near his household one by one, and Achan son of Carmi son of Zabdi son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. ²⁴Then Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan son of Zerah, with his sons and daughters, with his oxen, donkeys, and sheep, and his tent and all that he had; and they brought them up to the Valley of Achor.

Deut 5:21

²¹ Neither shall you covet your neighbour's wife. Neither shall you desire your neighbour's house, or field, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

Strong, rooted identity inside as God's people is the basis for expandable, compassionate boundaries looking outward

1. Expandable boundaries 1: widows and orphans and the landless poor-- those who have lost their connection to patriarchal household and land

Psalm 68:4-5

⁴ Sing to God, sing praises to his name;
lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds—
his name is the LORD—
be exultant before him.

⁵ Father of orphans and protector of widows
is God in his holy habitation.

Isaiah 10:1-2

¹ Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees,
who write oppressive statutes,
² to turn aside the needy from justice
and to rob the poor of my people of their right,
that widows may be your spoil,
and that you may make the orphans your prey!
³ What will you do on the day of punishment,
in the calamity that will come from far away?

2. Expandable boundaries 2: aliens / sojourners -- those from outside the community who have no connection to patriarchal household or land but who are living within Israel and Judah (refugees, transients, escaped slaves. permanent visitors)

Exodus 23:9

⁹ You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

Leviticus 19:34

The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Isaiah 14:1

¹ But the LORD will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land; and aliens will join them and attach themselves to the house of Jacob.

Ezekiel 47: 21-23

²¹ So you shall divide this land among you according to the tribes of Israel. ²²You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who reside among you and have begotten children among you. They shall be to you as citizens of Israel; with you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. ²³In whatever tribe aliens reside, there you shall assign them their inheritance, says the Lord GOD.

In combination, most often: aliens, widows and orphans as full members within the covenant community and most in need of community compassion and support

Deut. 5:12-15

¹² Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. ¹³For six days you shall labour and do all your work. ¹⁴But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. ¹⁵Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

Deut. 24:14-21

¹⁴ You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy labourers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. ¹⁵You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry to the LORD against you, and you would incur guilt. ¹⁷ You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. ¹⁸Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this. ¹⁹ When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all your undertakings. ²⁰When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. ²¹ When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. ²²Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this.

Deut 29:10-13

¹⁰ You stand assembled today, all of you, before the LORD your God—the leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officials, all the men of Israel, ¹¹your children, your women, and the aliens who are in your camp, both those who cut your wood and those who draw your water—¹²to enter into the covenant of the LORD your God, sworn by an oath, which the LORD your God is making with you today; ¹³in order that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God, as he promised you and as he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

3. Expandable boundaries 3: social minorities or “outcasts” -- those from inside or outside the community who from the point of view of some texts do not meet specific criteria of holiness for inclusion in the covenant community

2 Kings 5:1-15 (excerpts)

¹ Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favour with his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. ² Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman’s wife. ³ She said to her mistress, ‘If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.’ ⁴ So Naaman ... [with a letter from his king] went to the king of Israel. ⁷ When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, ‘Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?’ ⁸ But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, ‘Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.’ ⁹ So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha’s house. ¹⁰ Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, ‘Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.’ ¹⁴ So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean. ¹⁵ Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, ‘Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel.’

Jeremiah 38.13-28

⁴ Then the officials said to the king, ‘Jeremiah ought to be put to death, because he is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, and all the people, for he is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm.’ ⁵ King Zedekiah said, ‘Here he is; he is in your hands; for the king is powerless against you.’ ⁶ So they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern. Now there was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud. ⁷ Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch in the king’s house, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. ¹⁰ Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, ‘Take three men with you from here, and pull the prophet Jeremiah up from the cistern before he dies.’ ¹¹ So Ebed-melech took old rags and worn-out clothes, which he let down to Jeremiah in the cistern by ropes. ¹³ Then they drew Jeremiah up by the ropes and pulled him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

Isaiah 56:3-5

¹ Thus says the LORD:

³ Do ... not let the eunuch say,
‘I am just a dry tree.’

⁴ For thus says the LORD:

To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,
who choose the things that please me
and hold fast my covenant,

⁵ I will give, in my house and within my walls,
a monument and a name
better than sons and daughters;

I will give them an everlasting name
that shall not be cut off.

4. Expandable boundaries 4: foreigners -- those from outside the community who from the point of view of some texts do not meet purity criteria of holiness for inclusion in the covenant community

Joshua 2 (excerpts)

²Then Joshua son of Nun sent two men secretly as spies, saying, ‘Go, view the land, especially Jericho.’ So they went, and entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and spent the night there. ³Then the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab, ‘Bring out the men who have come to you, for they have come only to search out the whole land.’ ⁴But she said, ‘True, the men came to me, ... but where the men went I do not know.’ ⁶She had, however, brought them up to the roof and hidden them. ⁸She came up to them on the roof ⁹and said: ‘I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you. ¹⁰For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, whom you utterly destroyed. ¹¹ The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below. ¹²Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the Lord that you in turn will deal kindly with my family, .spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.’ ¹⁴The men said to her, ‘Our life for yours! If you do not tell this business of ours, then we will deal kindly and faithfully with you when the Lord gives us the land.’

Josh 6:22-25

(after the conquest of Jericho) ²² Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, ‘Go into the prostitute’s house, and bring the woman out of it as you swore to her.’ ²³So the young men brought Rahab out, along with her father, her mother, her brothers, and all who belonged to her—they brought all her kindred out—and set them outside the camp of Israel. ²⁵ Her family has lived in Israel ever since. For she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

1 Kings 17:8-16 (excerpts)

⁸ (During the drought), the word of the LORD came to Elijah, saying, ⁹‘Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.’ ¹⁰ When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, ‘Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.’ ¹²But she said, ‘As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.’ ¹³Elijah said to her, ‘Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. ¹⁴For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth.’ ¹⁵She went and did as Elijah said. ¹⁶The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah. [Later,] ²⁴the woman said to Elijah, ‘Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.’

Ruth 1 (excerpts)

¹In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. ⁴When they had lived there for about ten years, ⁵ (the husband and the sons died) so that the woman was left without her husband or sons. ⁶ Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab,

for she had heard that the LORD had had consideration for his people and given them food. ⁸ Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go back each of you to your mother’s house. ⁹The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of a husband.’ ¹⁴Then they wept aloud. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁶ Ruth said,
‘Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!
Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.

¹⁷ Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.

Ruth 4 (excerpts)

⁹Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, ‘Today you are witnesses that I have acquired from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to her husband. ¹⁰I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite to be my wife, to maintain the dead man’s name on his inheritance, today you are witnesses.’ ¹¹Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said, ‘We are witnesses.’ ¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the LORD made her conceive, and she bore a son. ¹⁷The women of the neighbourhood gave him a name, saying, ‘A son has been born to Naomi.’ They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Isaiah 56:1-5

¹Thus says the LORD:
Maintain justice, and do what is right,
for soon my salvation will come,
and my deliverance be revealed.

² Happy is the mortal who does this,
the one who holds it fast,
who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it,
and refrains from doing any evil.

³ Do not let the foreigner joined to the LORD say,
‘The LORD will surely separate me from his people.’

⁶ And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,
and hold fast my covenant—

⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.