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On Journeys and Crossroads

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*ON JOURNEYS AND
CROSSROADS:*

*Reflections on Exodus and the
Story of Our Lives*

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INTRODUCTION

Does the Bible still have anything to say to our lives and to our times? Through this talk entitled “On Journeys and Crossroads: Reflections on Exodus and the Story of Our Lives,” I would like to invite you to join me as we revisit select moments in the biblical story of Exodus in hopes that we might rediscover meaning that can accompany us along life’s way.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EXODUS

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EXODUS

In the Hebrew Bible, Israel's faith springs forth from the foundational experience of Exodus — the story of a people's journey from slavery and death, to freedom and life.

THE REALITY OF SLAVERY

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THE REALITY OF SLAVERY

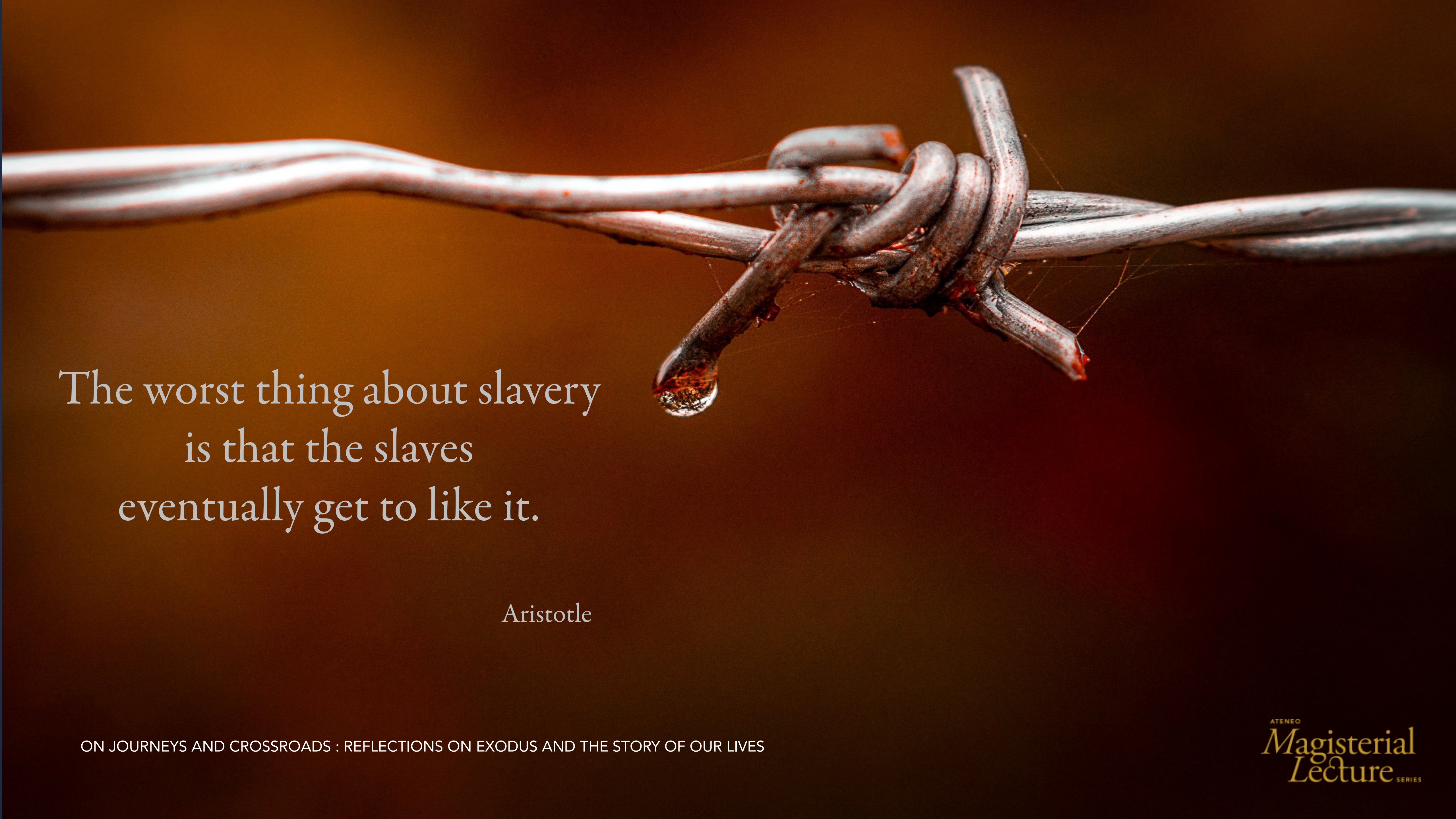
The phenomenal growth of the children of Israel leads to the people's enslavement:

“... they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor
... The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites,
and made their lives bitter with hard service” (Ex. 1:11, 13-14).

THE REALITY OF SLAVERY

Insight #1

You might not like slavery, but
after a while, you get used to it.



The worst thing about slavery
is that the slaves
eventually get to like it.

Aristotle

THE STORY OF EXODUS AND THE REALITY OF UNFREEDOM

“No one awakens in the morning, looks in the mirror, and says, ‘I think I will repeat my mistakes today,’ or ‘I expect that today I will do something stupid, repetitive, regressive, and against my best interests.’

“... [W]e have constructed patterns in our lives—patterns in relationships, patterns at work, and, so often, self-defeating patterns, which undermine our best interests....There is always a ‘logical’ connection between a surface symptom or pattern and a historic wounding to the soul.”

-James Hollis, *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life*, 2005

IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND THE REALITY OF UNFREEDOM

“For Ignatius, the ridding of our disordered attachments is most indispensable ... because we simply cannot seek, find, and do God’s will in our lives if we are not free enough from our disordered tendencies. With much ‘unfreedom’ in us we will never be able to do serious discernment and we will just continue to be at the mercy of our attachments.”

-Ramon Maria Luza Bautista, S.J., *Schooled by the Spirit*, 2009

THE STORY OF EXODUS AND THE REALITY OF UNFREEDOM

“I have always been distressed at the lot of those who are victims of various kinds of human trafficking. How I wish that all of us would hear God’s cry: “Where is your brother?” (Gen 4:9). Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labour? Let us not look the other way.... The issue involves everyone!”

-Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* #211

THE CRY

“The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out.... [T]heir cry for help rose up to God. God heard their groaning ... remembered his covenant ... and took notice of them” (Ex. 2:23-25)

- The people’s groan of pain is not merely an expression of misery. It is also a complaint, a protest, an acknowledgement that things are not right. It is the first sign of openness to the new and hopeful expectation that slavery is not the last word.

THE STORY OF EXODUS AND THE REALITY OF UNFREEDOM

Insight #2

The basic requirement of freedom is the awareness of “exile,” the groan of conscious alienation.

-Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg

IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND SELF-AWARENESS

ON JOURNEYS AND CROSSROADS : REFLECTIONS ON EXODUS AND THE STORY OF OUR LIVES

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IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND SELF-AWARENESS

“As Loyola observes, the enemy of human nature does fear discovery. While our weaknesses remain unacknowledged or closeted away, we are powerless over them. The sometimes painful process of dragging our weaknesses into full light of day by understanding them is the first empowering stride toward conquering them.”

-Chris Lowney, *Heroic Leadership*, 2003

THE CRY

“When the heart is able to ask itself and weep, then we can understand something.... Dear young boys and girls, today’s world doesn’t know how to cry ... Certain realities of life we only see through eyes cleansed by our tears. I invite each one here to ask yourself: have I learned how to weep? Have I learned how to weep for the marginalized or for a street child who has a drug problem or for an abused child?”

- Pope Francis, Message to Filipino Youth at UST, 18 January 2015

THE CALL OF MOSES

“The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” (Ex. 3:9-10)

“Moses represents God’s effort to liberate us by bringing our authenticity to play, by repeatedly casting us into the boiling cauldron of the Spirit that loosens our rigidity and shakes our conditioning, enabling us to approach everything anew with a pliable and free spirit.”

-Carlo M. Martini SJ, *Through Moses to Jesus: The Way of the Paschal Mystery*, 1988

THE CALL OF MOSES

“The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” (Ex. 3:9-10)

THE CALL OF MOSES

Insight #3 God calls each of us to the vocation of freedom.

THE SUMMONS TO VOCATION

ON JOURNEYS AND CROSSROADS : REFLECTIONS ON EXODUS AND THE STORY OF OUR LIVES

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THE SUMMONS TO VOCATION

“God calls you to make definitive choices, and He has a plan for each of you: to discover that plan and to respond to your vocation is to move toward personal fulfillment.”

-Pope Francis, World Youth Day 2013

“The Christian vocation, rooted in the contemplation of the Father’s heart, ... inspires us to solidarity in bringing liberation to our brothers and sisters, especially the poorest.”

-Pope Francis, World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 26 April 2015

A sunset over a city, likely Rio de Janeiro, with a stone wall in the foreground. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a golden glow over the city and the bay. The sky is filled with soft, golden clouds. The city buildings are silhouetted against the bright light of the setting sun. The water in the bay reflects the golden light, and the overall atmosphere is peaceful and contemplative.

God calls you to the place
where your deep gladness
and the world's deep hunger meet.

- Frederick Buechner

The meaning of life is to find your gift.
The purpose of life is to give it away.

- Pablo Picasso



FOR REFLECTION AND PRAYER

1. How would you describe your inner journey these past years? Take time to recall the most significant lights and shadows of your journey.
2. Reflecting upon your life and your deepest desires, what do you think you are being called to do?
3. What would you consider the 'Egypt' that enslaves you? How do these affect you, your relationships, work, and life?

INTRODUCTION

In the first part of our talk entitled “On Journeys and Crossroads: Reflections on Exodus and the Story of Our Lives,” we revisited three moments in the Exodus narrative – Israel’s slavery, their crying out, as well as the calling of Moses – and we reflected on what these might mean for us as individuals and as a society.

In this second part, we continue with our story and delve into three other moments/insights to accompany us in our journeys.

CROSSING THE SEA: FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM, DEATH TO LIFE

First Section: Ex. 14:1-14

Egypt changes its mind quickly regarding Israel:

“What have we done, letting Israel leave our service?”

Israel, too, quickly changes its mind:

“What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians?’ For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”

CROSSING THE SEA: FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM, DEATH TO LIFE

Why the longing for each other?

- Reason for nostalgia on the part of Egypt is to secure the satisfaction of their needs. Egypt is a limited world, focused on the level of needs.
- Israel longs for Egypt because of FEAR—fear of Egypt and fear of the desert.

CROSSING THE SEA: FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM, DEATH TO LIFE

Insight #4

What makes change difficult is fear. If you want to live in mediocrity, then live in fear.

- Fr. Venancio Calpotura SJ

CROSSING THE SEA: FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM, DEATH TO LIFE

“Fear governs so much of our lives ... Standing up to our fear is perhaps the most critical decision necessary in the governance of life ... One of the most common ways fear can be in charge will be found in our flight from personal responsibility ... [T]he other [by-product of fear] is lethargy... Forgetting that we are summoned by each moment to make life-defining choices is rather easy to do.”

-James Hollis, *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life*, 2005

CROSSING THE SEA: FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM, DEATH TO LIFE

There is a temptation that says it is "better to stay here," where I'm safe. But this is the slavery of Egypt: "I fear moving forward, I'm afraid of where the Lord will bring me." Fear, however, "is not a good counsellor."

-Pope Francis, *Courage in Spite of Our Weaknesses*, 2 July 2013

CROSSING THE SEA: FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM, DEATH TO LIFE


Moses' response:

“Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be still.”

CROSSING THE SEA: FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM, DEATH TO LIFE

Insight #5

To lead involves helping one's self and others 'see' things in a new light.

A hand is shown in silhouette, reaching out towards the sun as it sets over a calm body of water. The sun is a bright, glowing orb on the horizon, creating a lens flare effect. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a warm orange and yellow near the horizon. The water reflects the colors of the sky and the sun. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

May your choices
reflect your hopes,
not your fears.

- Nelson Mandela

CROSSING THE SEA: FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM, DEATH TO LIFE

Second Section: Ex. 14:15-25

Maneuver of the Cloud: “Then the angel of God who went before the host of Israel moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel.”

Before: Egyptians // Israelites // Cloud // Sea

Now: Egyptians // Cloud // Israelites // Sea

- Israel now had to make a decision. Before, God was in first position.
- Now Israel must choose.

CROSSING THE SEA: FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM, DEATH TO LIFE

Insight #6

Change happens only when we are willing to leave the familiar-that-enslaves behind.

CROSSING THE SEA: FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM, DEATH TO LIFE

“Newness often makes us fearful, including the newness which God brings us, the newness which God asks of us ... Dear brothers and sisters, we are afraid of God’s surprises! He always surprises us! The Lord is like that.”

-Pope Francis, Homily at Vatican Basilica, Holy Saturday 2013

CROSSING THE SEA: FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM, DEATH TO LIFE

Two Walls:

“And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.”

“right” = yamin, which also means “south”

“left” = semol, which also means “north”

- If the Israelites had the south to their right and the north to their left, they were traversing from west to east.

CROSSING THE SEA: FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM, DEATH TO LIFE

In the Ancient Near East, the “east” was the gate of life, the place where light (the sun) defeats darkness and death. The “west” was the entrance into the underworld, the world of darkness, death and evil.

Therefore, if the Israelites were traveling from West to East, they were traversing and fighting the forces of death, the forces of darkness and evil, the forces of their desires, to be born unto a new life at dawn.

CROSSING THE SEA: FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM, DEATH TO LIFE

“Growing up ... requires two practices. First, we must take responsibility for ourselves, and stop blaming others: the society, the parents, the partner, the malevolent gods.

Secondly, we have to look within to see the repetitive core ideas, the complexes, and the historic influences where the true enemy lies.”

-James Hollis, *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life*, 2005

CROSSING THE SEA: FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM, DEATH TO LIFE

“Human history, our history, the history of every one of us is never “finished”; it never runs out of possibilities. Rather, it is always opening to the new — to what, until now, we had never even had in mind. To what seemed impossible.”

-Pope Francis (as quoted by Cathleen Falsani), 23 May 2013

And suddenly you just know...
It's time to start something new
and trust the magic of
beginnings.

Meister Eckhart

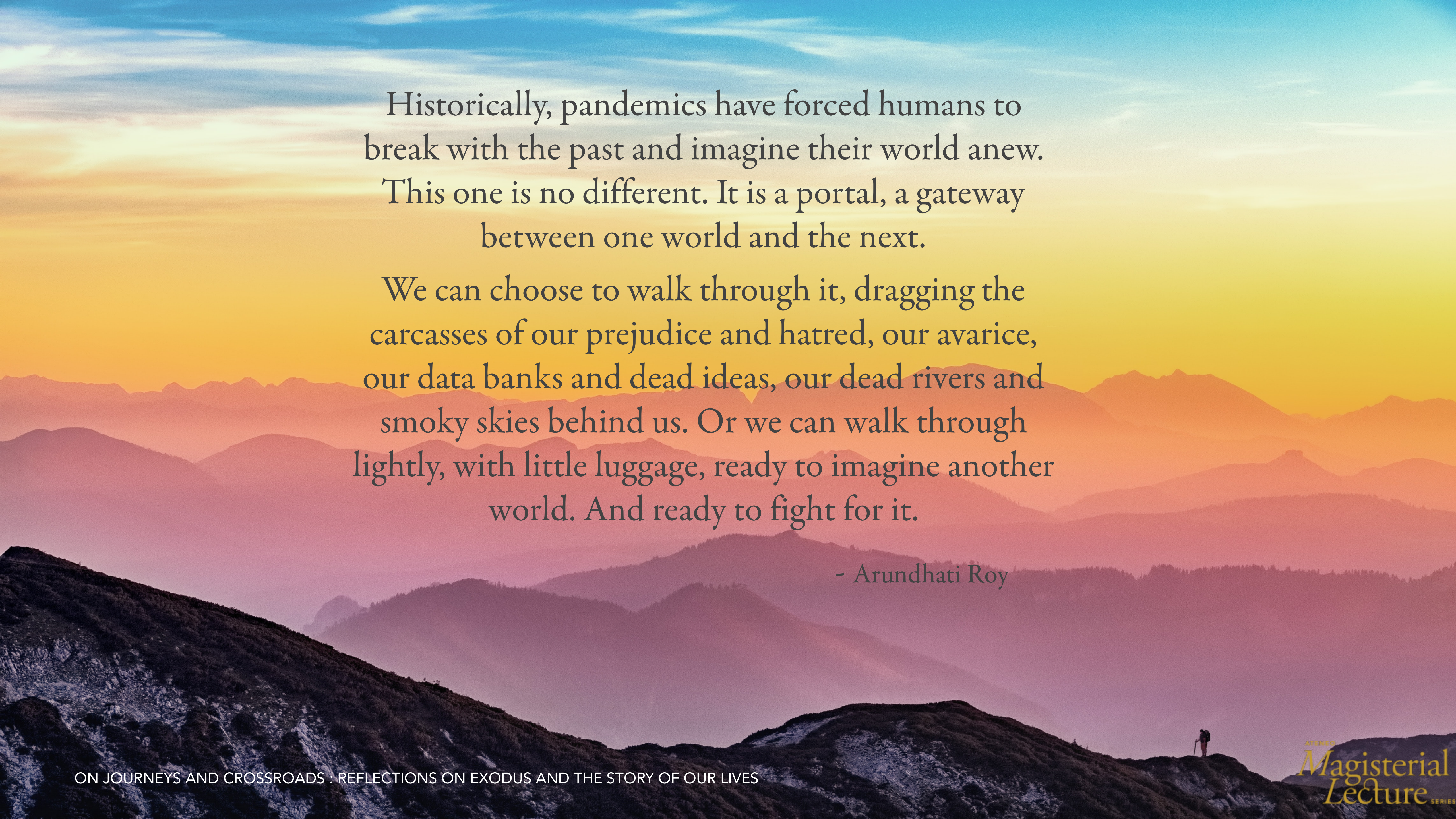


FOR REFLECTION AND PRAYER

1. What 'sea' is the Lord inviting you to cross? In what concrete area of your life are you being asked to move from slavery to freedom, from lethargy to generosity?
2. To what newness is the Lord inviting you?

SUMMARY

1. You might not like slavery, but after a while, you get used to it.
2. The basic requirement of freedom is the awareness of 'exile,' the groan of conscious alienation.
3. God calls each of us to the vocation of freedom.
4. What makes change so difficult is fear. If you want to live in mediocrity, then live in fear.
5. To lead involves helping one's self and others 'see' things in a new light.
6. Change happens only when we are willing to leave the familiar-that-enslaves behind.

The background of the image is a vast mountain range under a sky transitioning from a pale blue at the top to a warm orange and yellow near the horizon. The mountains are layered, with the closest ones in dark silhouette and the distant ones appearing as soft, hazy shapes. In the lower right foreground, a small figure of a hiker with a backpack is visible on a rocky ridge, looking out over the landscape.

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.

We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.

- Arundhati Roy