

I. Advanced Organizer

- A. There's a very old story that I had never heard until a couple of years ago. It's a story that has been told for thousands of years both in Jewish and Muslim communities. A version of the story appears in the Qu'ran as well as in the Jewish midrash, a collection of texts that inform and help interpret the Jewish community's understanding of the Torah. According to contemporary Rabbi and author Jeffery Salkin, this story is one of the most likely stories to be named, if you ask a contemporary Jew to tell a story they learned as a child about their Jewish faith. Many contemporary Jews don't realize it's not actually from the torah, it's so well known. The story goes something like this:
- B. *Abraham's father, Terah, was an idol-maker and merchant in Ur. Terah went away on a journey, and he left Abraham in charge of the store. Abraham took a stick and shattered all the idols in the store, and then he placed the stick in the hand of the largest idol.*

When Terah returned from his journey, he found his merchandise in pieces on the floor. "What happened?" he demanded to know.

"Oh, father, it was terrible," Abraham said. "The small idols got hungry and they started fighting for food, and finally the large idol got angry and he broke them into little pieces."

"Idols don't get hungry", said Terah. "They don't get angry, they don't speak—they're just idols."

Upon hearing this, Abraham smiled and said: "Oh, father, if only your ears could hear what your mouth is saying. If they're just idols, why, then, do you worship them?"

- C. This is the story that millions of our Muslim and Jewish brothers and sisters have learned about the father of the three Abrahamic faiths: that as a kid, Abraham, or Avram, was a cheeky young man who saw the futility of idolatry, and called it out. He smashed the idols.
- D. Rabbi Salkin has written a whole book about the importance of this story through the ages on Jewish identity. As he says in his introduction, *"The midrash about Abraham smashing his father's idols is an essential part of Jewish communal memory. It is part of the way that Jews define themselves: as the children of an iconoclast."*
- E. The word **"iconoclast"** is interesting, isn't it? I've generally understood it to be a rebel, a **provocateur**; someone who doesn't give a crap what you think, they are gonna say what they want to say and if it offends you, all the better. (There's a lot of those today on Twitter, aren't there?) The dictionary definition says as much, "someone who attacks cherished ideas or traditional institutions." But the second definition you'll often see reflects more the origin of the term. **An iconoclast is "a destroyer of images used in religious worship." To be an iconoclast is to be an idol smasher.**
- F. **And this is what Rabbi Salkin claims is central to Jewish identity:** that despite the fact that it isn't in the torah, this little story has persisted throughout millenia, because it connected and informed Jewish identity. **Jews understand themselves to be the one smashing the idols, confronting the sacred taboos, revealing the falseness and futility of worshiping what is ultimately human made.** As a person of Jesus-centered faith, I even wonder if Jesus might have heard a version of that story as a little boy, and how it might have shaped him and his understanding of what he was called to do.
- G. Well, I'm starting with this story because as I think most of you know by now, **we've been talking ourselves about smashing some idols here at Haven over the last several weeks.**

1. We've been considering that millenia later, we still make idols: it's just they're human constructs instead of statues. Our idols aren't made of stone, they're frameworks, worldviews, ways of understanding the world and prioritizing some points of view over others. It's not that these points of view are invalid, but they distort seeing the whole truth when they're not held in tension with other viewpoints. They become idols.
2. We've spent several weeks considering and unpacking specific ones.
 - a) We've named them, confronted how they can function as idols, talked about how they don't represent God -
 - (1) The idol behind Patriarchy: **Androcentrism**: the valuing of what is seen as masculine over what is understood as feminine; leads us to imagine God as male and suppress the feminine in the Divine
 - (2) **Heteronormativity**: understands biological sex, gender, and sexuality as simple binaries and doesn't have space to bless and affirm as fully created in God's image those who fall outside the binaries
 - (3) **Whiteness**: functions as a kind of collective blindness that keeps white folks from fully seeing the harm that they inflict on people of color, not simply through experiences of individual bias but through a historic and cultural system of oppression that assimilates those of European descent to concentrate power and hold more of it than people of color
 - (4) **Evangelicalism**: uses theology to uphold its social system and the androcentrism, heteronormativity, and whiteness embedded within, disinheriting from the family those who find God leading them in ways the framework of the system doesn't support
 - (5) **Nationalism**: expects that our Christian identity is connected to the political state, wrongly insisting that faithfulness to God is synonymous with allegiance to the state, including actions to "purify" the state, actively excluding those who are seen as other because of their race, their ethnicity, their language, or their religion.
 - (6) **Capitalism**: lures us with a false sense of freedom, a freedom that is ultimately rooted in the freedom to exploit others to enrich oneself, rather than to live generously and cooperatively caring for those in need
 - b) **These are just 6 examples of some of the big idols at work in our day.** There are more we could explore, and perhaps at some point we will. But while there's more at work in our society that we could name, these six are enough I think for us to look at and acknowledge that our culture has an idol problem. And that idol problem has caused real harm.
 - c) Juan Luis Segundo is a liberation theologian from Uruguay who names the link between our distorted views of God that stem from our idols and the harm that is done in that god's name:
 - (1) *"Our falsified and inauthentic ways of dealing with our fellow human beings are allied to our falsification of the idea of God. Our perverse idea of God and our unjust society are in close and terrible alliance."* As we've been naming throughout our series, our idols distort our vision of God, and when that happens, so often do injustice and oppression.
3. So what do we do when our eyes are opened and we see the idols in our midst? Is seeing them enough? Today, I want to conclude this journey with **a time of collective response**, a time we consider how we've been influenced by these idols and what it might mean for us to begin to change direction.

II. **We started this series with a story from the Hebrew Bible about idolatry** - Moses, Aaron, and the Golden calf. We're gonna wrap this series considering **another story around idolatry in the Hebrew Bible, and what was done about it.** This story isn't quite as charming as the Jewish midrash, but it's also a story about being an **iconoclast**. And I bring us into it as an invitation to what it might mean Haven for each of us to take up that work of shattering idols in our day, as well.

- A. **This is the story of King Josiah.** He lived in the 7th century BC. It was the time of the divided Kingdom, when Israel had separated into two kingdoms, the northern and the Southern. And both kingdoms had long had issues with idolatry. They struggled with faithfulness, and God sent prophets to both kingdoms to warn them that if they didn't turn, if they couldn't self correct, they'd experience real judgement.
- B. **The Northern Kingdom was the first to go.** Around a century before Josiah, they fell to Assyria. They were brutally wiped out. Those that weren't massacred were scattered through exile.
- C. **Josiah was King of the Southern kingdom, called Judah. And Judah was having its own issues with faithfulness.** His grandfather, Manasseh was a particularly brutal and unholy dictator, who apparently even sacrificed at least one of his own children. When he died, his son only was on the throne for two years before being murdered, and then the throne came to eight year old- Josiah.
- D. And as the Biblical authors tell the story, even as a young man, Josiah is different than the most recent Kings that have gone before him. By 16 he's become a person of faith, the scripture says, **"He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and followed completely the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left."** (2 Kings 22:2) He's a reformer. He's open to change. Understands it's necessary. Maybe he's heard the words of some of the prophets and takes them seriously; Jeremiah was a contemporary of his, and prophesied as a teenager in the same era.
- E. So one of the bigger projects Josiah undertakes to help right the ship is to do some **maintenance and purification of the temple.** Apparently it's been a while since anyone has undertaken this. So Josiah orders the folks who work in the temple to use some of the money they've been collecting to rebuild the parts that aren't doing well. And so a number of folks begin the work, and **while they're cleaning up and repairing the temple, Hilkiah the priest stumbles upon a copy of Torah,** the sacred Hebrew Scriptures. Apparently no one has actually had a copy for a while. Remember, back then, written copies of things were very valuable. Some scholars believe Josiah's tyrant grandfather might have even destroyed any copies he could. But apparently one was hidden away, and the priest finds this book of the law, and he takes it to Josiah's assistant, a guy named Shaphan. And here's what happens next, according to 2 Kings:
- F. ***'10 Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.***

11 When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. 12 He gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Akbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant: 13 "Go and inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the Lord's anger that burns against us because those who have gone before us have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us."

G. I'm gonna stop reading right there, because I think this is worth noting.

1. **Discovering the book of the Law for Josiah is an eye-opening experience.** It's an "oh holy crap" moment. It's a scales-falling-from his eyes experience. Josiah had some sense that things were off, that's why he had been trying to purify the country for years. He got that all was not well. He was a bit woke. **But when Shaphan reads the law to him, he realizes how off things are. How far they've really come from what God intended.** How deep the idolatry has penetrated into their social and religious system, and how far that is from God's desire. And his response is lament.
2. **The text says that the king tears his robes. Why does he do that? This was a common way in Ancient Israel of embodying grief.** At this point, it's been at least 60 years since the Word of God was read publicly and when he hears it Josiah realizes how much has unraveled in those 60 years. How far off course they've gone. And he grieves it. He understands on some level how much it must grieve the heart of God. And perhaps on some level he recognizes that the consequences may be beyond what anyone in his kingdom can imagine, so he laments.
3. **I don't know about you, but this series has felt a bit like that for me.** I went in with a certain sense of awareness that these idols we have been addressing have been problematic. But as we've been unpacking them together I feel like my own awareness of the idols and the costs of it have been blown open. I feel like blinders have been coming off and as they do, it's like bright sunlight flooding your vision after you come out from a dark room. It's painful to adjust - it's overwhelming to consider how long these systems of oppression have been operating. It's painful to try to wrap my head around what the costs have been, and what the costs may continue to be. And that stirs in me like Josiah, a sense of lament.
4. **But Josiah doesn't just grieve, he doesn't just become paralyzed and overwhelmed in lament. He seeks wisdom and he seeks connection with the living God.** Josiah seems counsel from the prophetess Huldah to help him understand how God perceives the idolatry his people have fallen into, and what is coming because of it.
5. And then after tearing his robes, and seeking deeper spiritual understanding through the prophetess, Josiah gathers the community to respond.

23 Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. 2 He went up to the temple of the Lord with the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets—all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord. 3 The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord—to follow the Lord and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.

4 The king ordered Hilkiah the high priest, the priests next in rank and the doorkeepers to remove from the temple of the Lord all the articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron Valley and took the ashes to Bethel. 5 He did away with the idolatrous priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem—those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts. 6 He took the

Asherah pole from the temple of the Lord to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem and burned it there. He ground it to powder and scattered the dust over the graves of the common people....

12 He pulled down the altars the kings of Judah had erected on the roof near the upper room of Ahaz, and the altars Manasseh had built in the two courts of the temple of the Lord. He removed them from there, smashed them to pieces and threw the rubble into the Kidron Valley. 13 The king also desecrated the high places that were east of Jerusalem on the south of the Hill of Corruption—the ones Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the vile goddess of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the vile god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the people of Ammon. 14 Josiah smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles and covered the sites with human bones....

21 The king gave this order to all the people: “Celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant.” 22 Neither in the days of the judges who led Israel nor in the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah had any such Passover been observed. 23 But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was celebrated to the Lord in Jerusalem.

- H. You see, **it wasn't enough for Josiah simply to have this awakening.** Josiah understood that **his awakening was useless if he wasn't willing to do anything about it.** He had to clean house or nothing would change. Whether or not it could reverse their fortunes and turn the tide on what was coming, if Josiah was gonna stand before Yahweh, he understood he could only do it with integrity **if he was willing not just to acknowledge but to confront the idolatry happening in his kingdom.** He needed to be an iconoclast. He had to smash some idols.
- I. **I think his response also reflects the reality that a corporate response was needed.** Ancient Israelites had much more of a sense of corporate solidarity than many of us who've been raised in a Western culture are able to comprehend. The contemporary West you could argue is invested in *the idol of individualism*. But this story points to something apart from that idol. It says that this is not just about your personal guilt or holiness before God. What God was angered with was the sin of the collective, and it required a collective response. It wasn't just about Josiah cleaning out idols from his castle, it was about the whole kingdom coming together, hearing the words of God, covenanting anew and destroying all of the idols.
- J. **So here at Haven, we have been in a process of naming idols; confronting them theoretically as problematic.** And I hope that as we've done so, some of those conversations have stirred things up for you to consider around ways that you are becoming more aware of the impact of these idols in your own view of the world, and even your own practice of faith. **But awareness without action isn't enough.** It wasn't enough for young Abraham just to be aware that his father was selling empty statues. It wasn't enough for Josiah just to recognize how far off course they'd gotten. Unless we clean house, unless we change course, unless we commit to smashing the idols, nothing's actually gonna change.
- K. Now I acknowledge, in many ways I think the kind of housecleaning that Josiah was leading the people in was easier. **There were physical statues that could be torn down, smashed, and burned.** The idols we're talking about are harder to dismantle, both through

the work of systemic change needed, as well as the internal work of our own investment in these systems and structures.

- L. But you have to start somewhere. **Two weeks ago I encouraged us to resist cynical fatalism.** It's too easy, it's too lazy, and frankly it's too faithless to simply shrug and say there's nothing we could do about any of this. It expects too little of God and the work of the Spirit not to give all that we can to participating with Jesus, led by Jesus, in the work of the iconoclast. We are called, Haven, just like our Jewish brothers and sisters before us, and I believe as many from all kinds of backgrounds will be called after to be smashers of idols. **We are people meant to be iconoclasts. People who identify the idols of our age, reveal them for what they are and the harm they produce, and participate in tearing them down so we can have a clearer, unobstructed view of one another and the Divine in our midst.**
- M. Which brings us to the invitation to us, Haven today, as we conclude the journey we've been on over the last few months as a faith community. We want to make space over the rest of this morning for us to have some communal time of response. Time to meditate together on what the Spirit might be inviting us to acknowledge as idolatrous in our own history, or worldview, or practice of faith. We want to make space to consider how each of us individually has participated in one of these forms of idolatry. We want to make space collectively to name that this is the sin in our midst. We want to make time to lament, to grieve the ways we've participated in the upholding of idols and the oppression they support. And also to begin to imagine another way, and how we might participate in transformation of ourselves and the world around us.
- N. So here's how the time is gonna go:
- a time of response in 3 movements - Confess, Smash, Celebrate

Confess:

1. Consider the idols we've discussed through this series, or another idol that you are aware of. Look at the images that evoke these idols on the tables, or draw an image yourself, representing participation in idolatry.
2. Choose an image that represents an idol that you believe the Spirit is inviting you to recognize your investment in. What ways have you participated in the veneration of this idol, knowingly or unknowingly? Allow the Spirit to speak to you about this, trusting what comes to mind could be from God. Color or draw on your sheet if you like, and write a brief confession of how you've been invested in this idol.
3. Tear off or cut a piece of each idol image you choose and put it in a glass bottle.
4. Display your confession. During worship, return to the display to read at least one other confession.

Smash:

1. Use the mallet in the gray bin to smash your glass bottle, symbolizing the smashing of your idol(s).
2. Over the coming week: speak with Jesus about what "smashing" this idol might actually look like in your life. What practices can you commit to to change course and dismantle the power of this idol in your life?

Celebrate:

- We will conclude this time of reflection by celebrating communion together, remembering how the Israelites before us celebrated the Passover after smashing their idols.