

Sermon – Maundy Thursday (04/14/22)

Text – Exodus 12:1-13

Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, “This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: ‘On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man’s need you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire—its head with its legs and its entrails. You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD’s Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.”

Theme – “The Passover Lamb”

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God meant business. He had sent His servant Moses to Pharaoh, telling Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go. The first time he went before the great king of Egypt, Pharaoh demanded that Moses do a sign to prove that his God was real. Moses and his brother Aaron then perform a miracle: Aaron casts down his rod and it becomes a serpent. But Pharaoh was unimpressed: he has his own court magicians do the very same thing. But then God proves that He is above all gods – for Aaron’s rod (by the power of God) swallows up all the other rods-turned-into snakes of the Egyptians. Moses’ God rules. But

Pharaoh still does not believe. Nor will he let the Israelites go. No, they are much too valuable as slave-labor to simply turn loose.

So God, through Moses, tells Pharaoh that He will bring plague upon plague down onto the Egyptians until they let His people go. And then those terrible plagues come. One after another. Each worse than the one before it. All water in Egypt is turned into blood, leaving nothing for man or beast to drink. Hordes of frogs descend upon the land, covering everything, then dying and rotting. Lice that afflict not just the scalp but all over the body, biting and crawling into eyes and ears and mouth. Flies that bite and attack, especially the eyes. A disease that kills the cattle and livestock. Boils that raise and fester all over the body. Fiery, burning hail that falls from the sky, destroying fields and homes. Locust that swarm in and eat up all the remaining green plants in the land. Darkness that comes at mid-day and turns day into night.

As these plagues come and afflict the Egyptians, Pharaoh is frightened. He begs Moses to take them away, promising to let the Hebrew slaves go. But each time, as soon as the plague subsides, Pharaoh reneges on his promises, his heart hardened and closed to God's call to repentance. And so comes the final, most terrible, plague of all – the one that Pharaoh cannot ignore or ever forget. The one that can never be undone.

God tells Moses that He will send an angel to go through the land and kill the first-born of all living things – man and beast. But to save His people, God commands Moses to institute the Passover. Each family is to take a perfect, unblemished male lamb one year old (in the prime of its life) and sacrifice it at twilight. They are to take the blood of the lamb and paint it on the door-posts of their homes, to mark them, so that the angel will pass over those houses and not take the lives of the first-born there. The family is to take the lamb's body and roast it whole in a fire, then eat it – along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The bread unleavened – without yeast – signifying that this is being

done in haste, as the families ready to flee Egypt. The herbs bitter to remind them of their suffering and oppression, from which God was freeing them.

Of course, you know what happens next. The angel comes. The first-born of each Egyptian family – human and animal – dies. Pharaoh is forced to let the Israelites go. They leave in haste, before Pharaoh can once again change his mind. But shortly after they leave, he DOES change his mind and comes after them with his army, catching them at the Red Sea. But God opens the sea to let His people go through on dry land (with “*unmoistened foot*” as one of our hymns poetically puts it). Then He closes up the sea once again as the Egyptians chase after them, swallowing them up and ending their threat to Israel.

God commanded the Israelites to commemorate this great event every year, as families gathered to participate in the Passover. It was not to be a past event for them, something that had happened “way back then”, a mere bit of history. No, for the Jews (even today) every Passover IS the first Passover. As they gathered together around the meal of lamb and bread and herbs, they would recite God’s great work of salvation for His people, but including themselves in the story by using “we” instead of “they”. Each person is there; each person is under Pharaoh’s rule; each person is readying for the flight; each person is saved from the Angel of Death by the blood of the lamb on the doorposts. (pause)

It was to celebrate this holy meal (and the deliverance granted by God) that Jesus and the Twelve gathered that Thursday night so long ago. That morning the disciples had asked Jesus where they were to prepare the Passover. He told Peter and John to follow a man carrying a water pitcher (something usually done only by women, and so an obvious sign) – follow him to the house he entered, and there they were to make ready for the feast. That night Jesus and the rest come to the upper room for the Passover meal.

During the course of the normal Passover celebration, Jesus takes the bread and after breaking it, gives it to the Twelve and says: “*Take and eat, this is My Body given for you for the forgiveness of your sins.*” Then He takes the cup and blesses it, gives it to them and says: “*Take and drink, this is My Blood shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.*” In all this Jesus is fulfilling and completing what God had started way back in Egypt, under Moses.

Jesus IS the Lamb. The Passover Lamb. The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. He is perfect and unblemished by sin. He is young and in the prime of life. He is sacrificed to save the people from death. His blood marks us and causes death to pass over us. His body is eaten in the most special and holy meal: the Lord’s Supper. Those are not new insights to you, I am sure. Many Maundy Thursday sermons – from me and other pastors – have dwelt on those themes. To us it is no great surprise or revelation.

But imagine what it must have been like for the disciples that night. Every year, as far back as they could remember, they had celebrated this holy day. Every year they ate this special feast, with its unique food. Every year they heard recited the story of Moses and Israel, of Pharaoh and the Angel of Death, of the plagues and the flight from Egypt. They knew this episode of their history – this important part of their faith – as well as they knew anything. Surely there was nothing about it that was hidden from them. Or so they thought. But then Jesus says and does what He said and did that night.

What had happened in Egypt more than 1400 years before that Maundy Thursday night in Jerusalem – that was only the beginning, a precursor, an introduction to God’s real point. What is about to happen here in Jerusalem – in this upper room and in Gethsemane and at Calvary – this is the *real* Passover.

The Lamb, of course, is Jesus. As He says to the Twelve, they are about to eat His Body (which will soon be killed and roasted in the fires of hell on the cross). His blood alone will make death pass

over. Those not marked with that holy blood – those who do not put their faith in Christ alone for forgiveness and life – will die. Not just physically, but spiritually. Not just now, on earth, but forever in hell. However, those who ARE marked by His blood are passed over from that judgment. Instead of death, they now have life – eternal life. Life in the Promised Land – not Canaan, but heaven. They will be set free from the oppression of Satan (worse than any Pharaoh), free from the slavery to sin (which is more bitter than any forced labor).

Imagine how confused those twelve apostles must have been. This bread is Your body? This wine is Your blood? How can that be? And we are supposed to eat and drink it? For our salvation? How? (pause)

Our annual commemoration of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and Easter are in many ways similar to that keeping of Passover by the Twelve. Every year we gather together and hear the old, old story. We put ourselves into it (we even have a hymn called “*Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?*”). We can see ourselves in the actors of the drama: how we, like Judas, betray Jesus by our sins. How we, like Peter, so often deny our Lord. How we, like the fickle crowd, reject our King. How we, like Pilate, try to wash our hands of any guilt. How we, like the soldiers, mock our Savior. We know this is not just dry, dusty, boring history but real-life current events – it is part of us, just as much as it is part of them.

But, sadly, sometimes our familiarity and knowledge become our enemy. We hear but do not listen. We see but do not understand. We know but do not feel. We need to be reminded of what all this means – and how it changes our very existence.

You are enslaved in sin. Death reigns over you. Satan holds you in the palm of his hand. You are without hope. You cry aloud to God in your misery and pain: “God, save me!” And He does. He comes – greater than any Moses. Not just a man, but God, to fight for you. To free you. To give you

life. And He does that by giving Himself over into the hands of sinners – the very ones He has come to save – to be beaten and mocked and killed. Just as He handed over His Body and Blood to the Twelve that night; just as He does the same here at the communion rail each time we have the Lord’s Supper. He gives Himself over for you. Because He loves you. (pause)

For you the Lamb has been killed. For you He has laid down His life. His blood marks you and so death passes over you. It is as we say in the baptismal liturgy: you have been marked with the sign of the cross as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. His blood is painted on you and cleanses you of all sin. As the water of the Red Sea saved the Israelites from pursuing Pharaoh, so the waters of baptism save you from the satanic hell-hound who chases after us. Like Pharaoh, Satan does not want to let us go. But he has no choice. God has given His First-Born – His Only Begotten Son – and so has bought our freedom. What a price He paid, but what a love He has! (pause)

So tonight when you come forward to the communion rail, remember the words He has spoken: *“This is My Body and My Blood. Given and shed for you. For the forgiveness of all of your sins.”* Let those words go past your ears and deep into your heart. Think of what they mean. And what they accomplish. Remember how the Lord has called you – by name – to be His own in baptism. Of how He has forever sealed you with the blood of the Lamb there, washing you, giving you the new birth and life that only He can grant. Rejoice in the freedom and salvation and deliverance that you have in the true Passover Lamb, who has taken away the sin of the world. Your sin. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Offertory/Offering