

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
April 13, 2017  
Maundy Thursday  
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Exodus 12:1-14  
Psalm 78:14-20, 23-25  
I Corinthians 11:23-26  
Luke 22:14-30

In our Old Testament lesson, Moses instructs the people regarding what is to become the seminal event in their history, their Exodus from Egypt. At the heart of their exodus from slavery is the event that inaugurates it – the Passover.

To prepare for the Passover, the people are to take lambs without defect and to slaughter them and to place the blood on the door frames of their homes, and then to eat a meal made from the lambs, along with the bread and bitter herbs.

The death angel will then pass through and strike down every first born male that is Egyptian, but when he sees the blood on the doors of the houses of the children of Israel, he will “pass over” those homes and they will be spared.

This event, the Passover, becomes the central event in all the Old Testament. It marks God’s deliverance of the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt, and begins their identity as God’s chosen people. And it is to be perpetually commemorated.

The reason Moses commands the people to perpetuate this event by celebrating Passover through ritual meal and action is not because he is sentimental and wants the people to remember the “good ol’ days.”

The reason he commands the people to do this is because he knows that it is important for people who come along generations later to be able to take part in what God has done, *to experience this past event for themselves even though they are many years removed from it.*

And so, through the ritual words and actions of the Passover meal, the people who came along later did just that. They experienced anew their deliverance from Egypt and their identity as God's people.

Come with me now hundreds of years later into the first century. If you ask most people today what the Jewish people were waiting for at the time of Jesus, the most popular response you would get goes something like this: "The people were waiting for an earthly, political Messiah to come and set them free from the Roman Empire and return the land of Israel to its rightful owners."

I have labored under this assumption for years, and preached to you about it. The people were looking for a "military" Messiah – a warrior king who would bring victory by defeating the empire of Caesar and reestablishing the earthly dominion of Israel.

And I was not *entirely* wrong. There is *some* truth to this. Some of the people in Jesus' day were looking only for political deliverance from their Roman overlords. The *Zealots* were the most notable group in this category.

I have subsequently discovered that when you actually read the Old Testament prophets and ancient Jewish writings themselves, you find something quite surprising. You discover that many ancient Jews were waiting for much more than just a military Messiah. What these folks were waiting for and praying for was the restoration of Israel in a *new exodus*.

The people were hopeful that a new Moses would come and that God would use him to recapitulate the events of the first exodus from Egypt. This new Moses would lead the people on another exodus where there would be a New Covenant, a new temple, and a new Promised Land.

With this longing at near fever pitch, Jesus sat together with his disciples in an upper room on a night much like this one. And he began to show his disciples that he was the *new* Moses who had come to lead the people in their long anticipated *new exodus*. As the leader of the new exodus, Jesus revealed to his disciples that ***he himself was the true Passover Lamb***, whose body and blood was about to be offered up so that God's people might be delivered from their slavery -- a slavery not to Egypt, but to sin and its deadly consequences.

And so it is that through the offering up of himself as the true Paschal Lamb, Jesus leads *us* out of slavery to sin and the old life, and into a New Covenant where we are born again to a living hope of resurrection and eternal life.

But some may ask, “How does this happen, when we are so many years removed from Jesus’ suffering and death?”

*It happens for us just as it did for the children of Israel, as we participate in the sacred actions and rituals that Jesus commanded on this night so many years ago.*

Paul echoes this in our epistle: “Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (I Cor. 11:26).

When we gather and partake of the Lord’s Supper, we are not merely “announcing” to ourselves and to the world that Christ died and rose again, as though we had short memories and constantly need to be reminded of this.

When we come to the table and enact these sacred actions and say these sacred words, *the power and reality of Jesus’ death is brought forward into the present moment. Christ’s saving work is present and active in our midst NOW.*

This is the meaning of the word “remembrance” in Scripture. Remembrance in Scripture is not about taking a mental photograph or conjuring up a memory. Remembrance involves ritual action where a past event is not only remembered, but made *present*. The Passover was to be a perpetual “remembrance,” and Jesus instructs his disciples at the Last Supper to “do this in remembrance of me.”

We are being led on a new exodus, brothers and sisters. This world is not our final home. We are looking for a city whose builder and maker is God.

But a new exodus requires a *new Passover*. The sacrifice of a holy, spotless, unblemished Lamb. The remainder of our service tonight and the actions of tomorrow remind us of this in graphic detail. So let us open our hearts, and prepare to enter fully the mystery of our salvation.

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