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Exodus 12:1-13; Mark 14:12-26
“Meal to Meal: The Passover to the Lord’s Supper”
Year B – Maundy Thursday
March 29, 2018

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thousands upon thousands, even millions upon millions of lambs have given their lives over the history of the Passover. Think of all the lifeblood poured out over the course of time. It’s somewhat gruesome to even think about it. But blood is a necessary thing for the salvation of God’s people

Long ago, in the land of Egypt, in a land of exile, the Israelites suffered under the iron fist and the iron heart of Pharaoh. This line of pharaohs had forgotten the saving work of Joseph and how he had delivered Egypt from the devastating famine. So, Pharaoh had enslaved the Hebrew people to do his manual labor—to build his cities and construct his monuments.

Terrible hardships, brutal labor, and utter despair were the reality of the Hebrew people. They groaned under the burdens placed upon them, they suffered under harsh taskmasters, and they cried out to the Lord in their misery. And God heard their cries, and He remembered His covenant with them. So He sent His servant Moses to bring the people out from the land of slavery. He sent Moses to be a mediator between God and Pharaoh, to free the people of Israel, to break their yoke of bondage, and to deliver them from the land of exile. Easier said than done, however!

Pharaoh was a stubborn man. Plague after plague only served to harden his heart further. One plague after another, each a judgment upon an Egyptian god, upon everything the Egyptians had placed their trust in, and yet Pharaoh stubbornly refused to submit to the will and power of the true God. The God of the Hebrews.

But God had a plan—a final plague—a plague that would crush the stubborn pride of Pharaoh, and that would point His own people to His grace promised in His covenant. And in preparation for this plague, the Israelites were told to take a lamb from their flocks—the best lamb, a male without blemish or spot—one lamb for each family. Then, they were to sacrifice the lamb and spread its blood above and around the door to their homes. Why? Because of that final plague to come. The blood of the lamb would protect and save their households from the angel of death. The blood of the lamb would save them from the judgment God was about to bring upon the people of Egypt.

That very night, the angel of death visited Egypt, and the firstborn male in every family died. Even the firstborn male of every livestock died. All the firstborn males, from the house of the lowest slave to the house of Pharaoh, died. Great wailing and mourning went up from the land of Egypt as they counted their dead. There was no escaping this terrible, avenging angel of death—no escaping *except* by the blood of the lamb. Every door of every house that had the blood was passed over. It was the blood of the perfect lamb that saved the Israelites from death.

Pharaoh finally relented, and the people of God were led out of Egypt. And so, every year at that same time, the people of Israel were instructed to celebrate this great rescue, to once again sacrifice a lamb as they remembered the Lord's Passover, as they remembered the rescue and deliverance accomplished by the blood of the lamb.

Thousands of years later, thousands of Passovers later, Jesus was gathered with His disciples in the Upper Room, once again to celebrate that Passover meal. They ate, they drank, they remembered the great salvation God worked for His people as He brought them out of Egypt—delivering Israel from the land of their suffering and ending their exile in a foreign land.

And in the midst of all this, Jesus said, "I have something *new* for you." "Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when had given thanks he gave it to them... and he said to them, 'This is my blood of the [new] covenant, which is poured out for many'" (Mark 14:22-24).

The Old Testament covenant of the Passover was now fulfilled and surpassed by the New Testament covenant of the Lord's Supper. It was estimated that on any given Passover in Jerusalem, the blood of hundreds of thousands of lambs would be sacrificed every year. And all this sacrifice would now be fulfilled in the blood of one single Lamb, the Lamb of God, who, as John proclaims, takes away the sin of the whole world.

All of those lambs, the best from each flock, lambs without blemish or spot, all pointed forward to their fulfillment that would come in the perfect Son of God, who was without blemish or sin. In Him, the salvation, the deliverance from being captive to sin and death would be complete. We are returned from exile, into a new freedom—a new covenant with God, through Jesus Christ.

From one holy meal to another, from one precious sacrament to another, one blood rescue to another; this is the story, the salvation story, of God's people. This is the journey: the return from exile for the children of God. And the journey now take us into the Upper Room to receive the true body and blood of our Savior Jesus Christ—a great journey, a new meal, a new sacrament, and a new covenant in Christ.

And we are now the people of this new covenant. Jesus instituted this meal for our benefit. Because we are the people who were in exile. We are the people who needed cleansing of our sins. We are the people washed in the blood of the Lamb. We are the people who have been saved from the judgment of God, and who have received the grace of God in Word and Sacrament. We are the people for whom the blood of the Lamb, offered upon the cross at Calvary, ensures our salvation, as it cleanses us from every blemish and spot, from every sin and iniquity.

All of the millions and millions of Passover lambs over the years, all of the blood, it all points to the cross. Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! The blood shed on the holy hill of Calvary brings us back to the Upper Room, and the words of Jesus echo in our hearts: "Take eat; this is My body, which is given for you. . . . Take, drink; this is My blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of Me."

As we receive once again the holy meal this evening, it points us to that last meal Jesus shared with His disciples in the Upper Room that night. And it also points us to what takes place tomorrow, on Good Friday, as the body and blood that He offers in the bread and the wine is the same body and blood offered on the frame of that cross. As we receive the Sacrament, we remember the sacrifice of the Lamb, when we were cleansed from all our sin and shame.

And because we are now cleansed, we also know that we receive this Sacrament as a foretaste, a foreshadowing of the greater meal to come, the meal in the presence of the Lamb in the courts of heaven that will have no end.

Tonight, though, is one more step in our Lenten journey: meal to meal, Passover to the Lord's Supper. A sacramental journey marked by the blood of the Lamb, our Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ. In His name. Amen.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

(This sermon is adapted from CPH materials for the series, *Return to Exile: A Lenten Journey* 2017.)