

Sermon for Maundy Thursday
Luther Memorial Chapel, Shorewood, Wisconsin
Pastor Michael Larson
4/9/2020



Readings: Exodus 12:1-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32; John 13:1-15 (34-35)

O Lord, in this wondrous Sacrament You have left us a remembrance of Your passion. Grant that we may so receive the sacred mystery of Your body and blood that the fruits of Your redemption may continually be manifest in us; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

There was a time when God's people were slaves in Egypt. They cried out to God for help and rescue, and God heard their cry. He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He remembered His promise to make of them a great and powerful nation. So God sent a series of plagues to break the will of Pharaoh and bring about the

deliverance of His special people. Of those ten plagues, the final one was the most devastating of all. God would pass through the whole land of Egypt at midnight and the Angel of Death would strike down every firstborn as a final judgment upon sin and its wages.

But for God's people, it would be different, because He would provide the way of escape. And He would do it all through a meal of deliverance called the Passover.

The congregation of Israel was given some special instructions by God for this special meal. On the evening of this final plague they were to take a male lamb, a year old, and without blemish, and sacrifice that lamb at twilight. They were to take the blood of the lamb and smear it over the doors of their homes. When the Angel of Death would see the blood of the lamb painted over their door posts he would pass over, and that family would be spared. They would eat the roasted lamb, receiving the Lord's gift of salvation through that meal, and in accordance with the words and promises of God. In that eating and drinking they would pass from death to life.

It was a meal full of hope and promise but hope and promise under the very threat of death. So just imagine being there at that first Passover. Gratitude and joy, no doubt, but also some dread - for just overhead the angel of death was passing over - striking down with death and destruction. Just imagine a celebration or banquet being thrown in your honor with live ammunition whizzing over your head. In the midst of that fear, this meal would be a celebration of life because it meant their deliverance and release. This was Israel's Passover, the Old Testament sacramental meal of deliverance, their exodus, from Pharaoh, slavery, and destruction. And He did just that!

The blood of the sacrificial lamb would mean life for every household. Death would pass over. They were to eat and drink this meal with some urgency, with their belts fastened, sandals on their feet, and staff in their hands. They were to eat while dressed for action because God would be

leading them out from slavery – delivering them up out of bondage – to a land flowing with milk and honey.

How awesome that meal and deliverance was! But here's the thing! That meal, as incredible as it was, was really just a dress rehearsal for the greater deliverance to come, which we all celebrate tonight. Maundy Thursday we call it. It's the night when our Lord, the Lamb of God, gives us His Holy Supper, the sacrificial body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink.

Remember there were two fundamental actions of the Passover. First, there was the slaughter of the lamb, and second, the eating of the lamb. By the shedding of the lamb's blood, victory over death and slavery in Egypt was secured. By the eating of the lamb, the victory was received by the faithful. Moses called the Passover "an everlasting ordinance" for good reason because it all finds its fulfilment in Christ for all eternity.

In our Gospel tonight Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples because it's all coming to its fulfilment in Him. Let us confess those words together. Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

You see, He is our true Passover Lamb and the by the shedding of His blood on the cross, our salvation is secured. In His death He offers Himself up as the unblemished Lamb for our sins, and in the Lord's

Supper we receive that very salvation which He won for us in His sacrificial death.

What is the benefit of this eating and drinking? Well, Luther puts it this way in the Catechism: “These words, ‘Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,’ show us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.”

Luther teaches the following in the Large Catechism. He says, “Here in the Sacrament you are to receive from the lips of Christ forgiveness of sins. It brings with it God’s grace and the Spirit with all His gifts, protection, shelter, and power against death and the devil and all misfortune.”

Those are words to remember in this fallen world of ours – at such a time as this! Surrounded by pandemic and panic we’re suffering through a little exile of our own. Perhaps you can’t be at your church on this day, but that doesn’t mean the Lord is not with you, in your home and in your heart, caring for you and those you love.

After all, the Lord sees the blood of the Lamb painted over the door posts of your home too. He sees your baptism and the blood that covers you and your children. These days in the news and media, death and destruction appear to loom large on every side, but for us Christians called to faith in the Gospel, every danger of body and soul has already passed over.

Therefore, on this holy night, remember that everything that troubles you and all that robs you of joy is eclipsed by this meal of deliverance. As Christ has given Himself to us so completely with His body and blood, so, too, this Sacrament teaches us to love one another, just as He has loved us. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Prayer of the Church

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Heavenly Father, on this holy night, we remember the Passover of Your ancient people, fulfilled in Your Son's gift of the New Testament in His blood. Be gracious to us and bless us. Remember not our sins and transgressions, for they have all been blotted out by the blood of Christ Jesus, our Passover Lamb. Forgive us, and create in us new and contrite hearts. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Father, give wisdom, understanding and boldness to all preachers of the Word during these holy days and hard times, that their preaching and teaching would edify Your children and move them to faithfully meditate upon the Passion of Your Son, through which they have eternal salvation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father, strengthen all of our sister churches throughout the world who celebrate the mystery of Your Son's Passover and those Christians who are unable to gather together. Where there is distress, bring consolation; where there is strife, bring forgiveness; where there is suffering, bring help; and where there is persecution, bring freedom and joy. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty Father, guard and defend the president of the United States, along with all whom You have placed in authority over us. Give wisdom and charity to all who speak and act for the common good. Preserve our regard for human life, family and livelihood. Do not let fear or the concerns of this body and life keep us from the bread that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man alone gives us. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Compassionate Father, remember all who suffer in body or soul. Most especially do we implore Your mercy to stay Your hand and drive away plague and pestilence. Spare us and those for whom we pray. Comfort us in our trials, and enliven our faith in Christ, our only hope. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, Your Son instituted this most blessed Sacrament to eat and to drink, that what is promised in His testament may be truly received by His friends and heirs. Have mercy on all who are kept from Your table in extraordinary circumstances, and do not shut them out of Your Supper forever. Let the words of this testament echo in their ears and hearts and, in true faith, let them believe these words, trusting that they receive spiritually in faith exactly what Your Son has both won and declared: the forgiveness of sins. Stir up in us a desire to commune with our fellow Christians on Your true body and blood, and bring us soon to the table. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, as Your Son took on the form of a slave and washed the feet of His disciples, so make us ready to serve our neighbors ahead of ourselves. Teach us to love each other and bear one another's burdens, and conform us to the image of Jesus. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Father, Your Son's forehead was marked by bloody sweat as He contemplated what fulfilling Your will to save us involved. Nevertheless, He drank the cup of Your wrath and punishment down to its dregs, thus fulfilling Your will to save us with His holy and precious blood. In Him is salvation, life and resurrection from the dead. Grant this unto us all, O Father; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. **Amen.**

Hymn of the Day: Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Savior LSB 627



1 Je - sus Christ, our bless - ed Sav - ior, Turned a - way God's
 2 As His pledge of love un - dy - ing, He, this pre - cious
 3 Je - sus here Him - self is shar - ing; Heed then how you
 4 Praise the Fa - ther, who from heav - en To His own this



wrath for - ev - er; By His bit - ter grief and woe
 food sup - ply - ing, Gives His bod - y with the bread,
 are pre - par - ing, For if you do not be - lieve,
 food has giv - en, Who, to mend what we have done,



He saved us from the e - vil foe.
 And with the wine the blood He shed.
 His judg - ment then you shall re - ceive.
 Gave in - to death His on - ly Son.

- 5 Firmly hold with faith unshaken
 That this food is to be taken
 By the sick who are distressed,
 By hearts that long for peace and rest.
- 6 Agony and bitter labor
 Were the cost of God's high favor;
 Do not come if you suppose
 You need not Him who died and rose.
- 7 Christ says: "Come, all you that labor,
 And receive My grace and favor:
 Those who feel no pain or ill
 Need no physician's help or skill.
- 8 "For what purpose was My dying
 If not for your justifying?
 And what use this precious food
 If you yourself were pure and good?"
- 9 If your heart this truth professes
 And your mouth your sin confesses,
 You will be your Savior's guest,
 Be at His banquet truly blest.
- 10 Let this food your faith so nourish
 That its fruit of love may flourish
 And your neighbor learn from you
 How much God's wondrous love can do.