

Mid-week Lent II

St. Mark 14:12-25; Exodus 12:1-14

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

It must have been an interesting day. Things happened that day that had never happened before. I know, that sounds a bit loaded; new things happen every day. But this day was...different.

The whole assembly of the Israelites had gathered lambs to slaughter them. The Israelites were great in number, and each family had a lamb to slaughter, or one to share with another small family. At the same time, in all of Goshen, the throats of the lambs were slit, and the blood was used to cover the lintel and doorposts of their houses.

And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead. (Exodus 12:29-30)

The Egyptians and their king were sinning against God and His people. What had once been a hospitable land for the Israelites had turned hostile; this new Pharaoh had forgotten Joseph and his people. (cf. Exodus 1:8) They were subjugated, enslaved, and bound in chains, as it were. They were forced to work in order to build great monuments to the Egyptians, building bricks and likely using those bricks for many structures that may even stand to this day. The work was strenuous and the reward tenuous, but then, what do you expect of a slave's life.

God sent ten plagues to afflict the Egyptians, ten signs of his wrath against stubborn, hard-hearted angst toward Him and His people. The tenth was death. It is the wages of sin, (cf. Romans 6:23a) and God paid them in full. Every firstborn in the land of Egypt—man and beast—lost his life as God executed His judgment against sin. That is, unless, they were marked with the blood of a lamb upon their doorways.

A sacrifice was made of one in place of another. Lambs vicariously shed their blood and gave their lives as a propitiation for the Israelites' firstborns. It echos Abraham and Isaac on the mountain top, where in the process of sacrificing his son, Abraham's arm was stopped as a ram caught in a thicket was provided to take Isaac's place. (cf. Genesis 22:1-14)

God has a way of redeeming His people, of bringing them out of slavery and death to freedom and life. That way is always death and resurrection. On Moriah, Isaac was as good as dead, but was brought back to life with his father through the death of another. In Egypt, the firstborn were as good as dead, but were spared from that death by the death of another to a life of wandering in the wilderness.

It was real: real death, real sacrifice, real redemption, real salvation. There may be connections to make, things which may seem coincidental to the casual observer—Moriah, Egypt, Lord's Supper,

Jesus on the cross—but they each carry their own, real significance. And while we speak of fulfillment, that fulfillment does not negate the fact that what happened on Moriah was real salvation for Isaac and what happened in Egypt was real salvation for the Israelites. They have been freed from death (if at least that one time) and given a new life, if not a new lease on life.

And so, from that time on, the Israelites remembered their deliverance from bondage in Egypt with a meal: lamb roasted in fire, bitter herbs, unleavened bread, and wine. “So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance.”

That's where Jesus and his disciples are on that evening evening, that dark and doleful night. In an upper room in Jerusalem, they are remembering what God had done in Egypt so long before. But this is no ordinary night. This is the night when Jesus will be betrayed by one who eats with Him—by one who is remembering the Passover and the life-from-death event that encapsulates the mercy and grace of God to free His people. Once again, things are happening that never happened before, but they look eerily similar to what had happened in Egypt.

That night, Jesus took the unleavened bread and said it is His body. Jesus took a cup of wine and said it is His blood. Body and blood given and shed, just like the Passover lamb gave its life for the salvation of the Israelite firstborn and shed its blood to be painted on the doorway so that death would pass over that house.

Now Jesus is preparing to give His body over to death and shed His blood so that death would be a conquered enemy for them and for you. Is it any wonder that John, the forerunner of Jesus, pointed to this Man and called Him the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world? (cf. John 1:29) Jesus is Your Passover Lamb for all time, once for all. He is your continuing remembrance and memorial of the satisfied wrath of God for sin.

And it is with good reason. The world outside may not look like Egypt for all. It may not resemble the work of making brick and building monuments. But everyone is caught in their own little Egypt. Each of you has a Pharaoh lording over you and binding you in chains. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (cf. Romans 3:23), and the wages of sin continues to be death. For your sins you ought to die, but like Isaac before you, God has provided a Lamb to take your place—the Lamb of God, God's very own Son, Jesus the Christ, the One anointed to die in the place of sinful man.

The payment for your sins is death, and God has paid the price in full. Jesus has gone to the cross, fully man and fully God, and received the wages due you. Through the death of the Lamb, you are set free, free from the bonds and chains that marked you as a dead man as you have been brought back to life from death; Jesus died, and you live—it is the simplest way to state the great exchange that happened at the cross.

Now, you are covered by the blood of this Lamb as the doorways were covered in Egypt. For you, death is a conquered enemy, and you do not die as the wage for your sins. Jesus has already done that. No, to you is given the gift of life for the sake of the blood of the Lamb of God. You are painted with this blood, and so death passes over you—a death which is the eternal separation from God and His mercy, a death reserved for the unbelievers. This is what Jesus taught when He said,

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. (John 11:25-26)

You are covered with the blood of the Lamb, as your robes were washed clean in His blood in Holy Baptism. Though you may die before Jesus' return, yet shall you live because you are marked with His blood. And for the sake of His blood, you shall never taste death, not the death like He tasted, which was the wrath of God for your sin and a descent into hell, though for Him, not to suffer apart from God's mercy, but to declare God's victory over sin and death, which is yours, thanks be to God, for the sake of Jesus Christ!

Though you may die, you shall live because on the last day, the Holy Ghost will raise you and all the dead, and give eternal life to you and all believers in Christ. You go the way paved by your Lord and God, Jesus Christ. Being fully God, death could not contain Him. He is risen to life again, a sure sign and testament of the life eternal that is yours now, but by way of death and resurrection—first, the death and resurrection of the Lamb of God, and second, your death, as you pass from this temporal existence, and resurrection as on the last day, you are raised to life eternal. You are bound up with Jesus in His death and resurrection, so they are yours, even as you follow Him through death and resurrection. (cf. Romans 6:3-11)

Death and resurrection...it's the way of salvation for our God. And it is exactly what you proclaim every time you eat of the New Passover meal. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes." (1 Corinthians 11:26) A piece of unleavened bread is Jesus' body for you; a sip of wine is Jesus' blood for you. Your eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood gives you what He won on the cross—forgiveness, life, and salvation. This is the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ for you.

Jesus was incarnate, was born, celebrated Passovers and the Last Supper, was betrayed, was crucified, and was buried for you. His death for sin is your death to sin. The forgiveness He won on the cross as He spilled His blood covers your guilt and shame and sin as the lambs' blood covered the doorways. To you, the blood of the Lamb was applied for life as you were washed in the water and the Word, and it is your daily sign and seal of a life redeemed from the chains and bondage to sin and death. For by that water, blood, and Word, you are the righteousness of God. You are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.