

Maundy Thursday (3)

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Date: 24 March 2016

[0:00] 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. No plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So one of my seminary classmates once got a bold idea.

Now, as most of you know if you've been in the church for any length of time, a priest who thinks that he has a great idea can be a really dangerous thing. You weren't supposed to laugh.

Now this is only truer of seminarians. They're even worse. Now this classmate of mine was convinced that contemporary Christians don't really grasp the reality of the Old Testament sacrificial system and the sacrifice of Christ.

So his suggestion is this. Maybe we should, on occasion, slaughter a lamb in church so that people get the picture. Would you guys mind if I gave that a try?

[1:24] Or altar guild, could we get the animal blood out of the lens if we would give that a go?

Now my classmate ultimately decided against that rather messy sort of approach.

But there is something important in his idea. The significance of blood in our faith, something that might seem unreal or remote to us, but it's there in our Old Testament account for tonight.

It's there in our readings for Holy Week and it's there for a reason. Now, why do we read from Exodus during Holy Week? From the Old Testament, when we're talking about the events of the last days of Christ before his death and resurrection.

What is the connection there? Well, some of you will remember that I quoted from St. Augustine of Hippo during our Lenten teaching series when he said, the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New.

Now, in the Passover account that we see in Exodus, we see types and we see figures and we see foreshadowing of what our Lord Jesus Christ would accomplish with his death and his resurrection.

[2:45] So let's take a look at the Passover story. Now, what led up to that? Now, we see in Exodus that the children of Israel had been in bondage, had been in slavery in Egypt, and the Lord had heard their cries and was determined to set them free.

But the Egyptian Pharaoh was unwilling to set them free. So God struck Egypt with a series of plagues.

The final one, the most devastating of them, happened the night of the Passover when God struck down the firstborn of all the families in the land of Egypt, except for in the houses of the Israelites.

The plague set the stage, ultimately, for the Exodus, where God would indeed set the Israelites free, leading them from slavery to freedom through the crossing of the Red Sea.

So let's ask ourselves, now that we have the context, if the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and our lectionary for tonight was set up, assuming that it does, how does our Exodus Passover account look forward to Christ?

[4:09] Well, let's take a look at it, starting in verse 1, and we'll see. The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, This month shall be for you the beginning of months.

It shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month, every man shall take a lamb according to their father's houses, a lamb for the household.

Now, if we know our New Testament, the mention of a lamb here should get our attention and raise some associations. Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

That connection there is important because it helps us to see that in some way, the lamb in this count probably represents Jesus. To put it another way, that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Passover lamb.

Now, moving on in verse 4, If the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons. According to what each can eat, you shall

make your count for the lamb.

[5 : 23] Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male, a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

Now, in these verses, two things I really want us to note. One, only a lamb without blemish is allowed. That is what is specified.

In other words, a lamb without any imperfections. Sound familiar? Jesus, the lamb of God, like us in all ways, except sin.

A lamb without blemish. An exceptional, spotless lamb. That's Jesus. Spotless lamb that will be killed.

Again, representation of Christ. Continuing with verse 7. Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.

[6 : 34] They shall eat the flesh that night roasted on the fire. With unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts.

You shall let none of it remain until morning. Anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. In this manner you shall eat it with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand.

And you shall eat it in haste as the Lord's Passover. Now, two things also I want us to notice in these verses. The Israelites are covering the doorposts and the lintels of their houses with the blood of the lamb.

If the lamb ultimately points us to Christ is fulfilled in him, and it is, then it makes sense that the blood of the lamb is to point us to the blood of Christ.

We'll see in a minute what the blood they put on the doorposts is meant to do. And this will become even clearer for us.

[7 : 46] Notice also that they are supposed to eat the lamb. This should remind us of Christ who said, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

And that, of course, especially in the context of tonight, reminds us of the Last Supper and the institution of Holy Communion. So what is the blood on the doorposts, therefore?

Why are they smearing blood on their doorposts? What's that about? Starting in verse 12. I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast, and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment.

I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign to you. On the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you.

And no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. So the Lord is about to execute righteous judgment on the land of Egypt.

[9 : 05] But that judgment will not touch the Israelites. Not their houses, not their families, not their children. And why not? Because when the Lord passes through Egypt to execute judgment, He will see the blood of the Lamb on their houses and will pass over them and won't strike down their firstborn.

they will be safe from the righteous wrath of God through the blood of the Lamb. Sound familiar? should. It should. Because Jesus Christ is our Passover Lamb. His precious blood saves us from the righteous judgment of God.

His blood covers our sins, answers for our sins, even though judgment is coming, through faith in His death, through faith in His blood, through faith in Christ, we are spared.

Not because we deserve it, but because the blood of the Lamb covers us. Notice in verse 14, This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord.

[10 : 32] Throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. a statute forever. What's up with that?

Are we keeping it still? If it's supposed to be a statute forever, why aren't we doing it? Well, here's the answer. We are.

Holy Communion, Holy Eucharist, is our Passover meal, and we keep it weekly. Now, Holy Communion, like all things that are part of the New Testament and fulfillment of the Old, didn't abolish the Passover meal, it is the fulfillment of it.

Week after week, we do it in remembrance of Jesus, our Lord and our God, our Passover Lamb, who shed His blood for us and covered us with His blood.

Now, if we look later in the chapter, in verse 24, we'll see this, you shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. When you come to the land that the Lord will give you as He promised, you shall keep this service.

[11:48] And when your children say to you, what do you mean by this service? You shall say, it is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover. For He passed over the houses of the people of Israel and Egypt when He struck the Egyptians, but spared our houses.

And the people bowed their heads and worshipped. We proclaim the Lord's death as our Passover Lamb every time we celebrate Holy Communion until He comes again.

When our children ask us what we mean by this, and they will, I can vouch for that, what do we tell them?

We tell them about our Passover Lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ, how His blood has covered us so that when the judgment of God comes, we will be spared.

Now a song we're going to sing in a few minutes is our communion hymn, Behold the Lamb, provides a perfect answer to the question of what you mean by this service, I think, as it's applied to Holy Communion.

[13:05] It says, Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away, slain for us, and we remember the promise made that all who come in faith find forgiveness at the cross.

So we share in this bread of life, and we drink of His sacrifice as a sign of our bonds of peace around the table of the King. Now for the Old Covenant Jews, the Passover was a participation in God's sparing of their ancestors when He passed over their houses in the land of Egypt.

It points us to Christ through signs and types and figures points us to the Lamb, to His blood. And so for us, as New Testament believers, our Passover meal, Holy Communion, is, as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10, a participation in the body and blood of our Lord.

is there any doubt that we need the body of Christ broken for us and the blood of Christ shed for us?

Not just us, but the world is in need of Christ. Because the judgment came the night of the Passover was a foreshadowing of a greater judgment that is to come.

[14:34] The Lord is coming again to judge the living and the dead, to execute judgment. And thank God that He is the heartache, the cruelty, the evil, the injustice, the hatred, the violence at work in the world.

All of it will need to be dealt with, and it will be. But then we have to ask, how are we to escape judgment?

We who are ourselves sinners. Blood of our Passover lamb covering us. The blood of Christ that covers all who come to Him in faith and repentance.

And when God sees us covered in the blood of the lamb and clothed in His righteousness, His judgment will pass over us. Now this week, we remember Christ's identity as our Passover lamb. We remember His betrayal. We remember His death. On Sunday, we will remember His resurrection. That we have the promise of eternal life in Him.

[15:50] in these services. We remember the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. We remember that no matter how dark things seem to get, God will have the victory.

Do we believe that? Are we living as if we believe that, leading lives of joy and obedience? Do we know people who don't believe it?

And if so, are we willing to tell them? We remember the body of Christ broken for us. The blood of Christ shed for us.

And as we remember this week, let's ask ourselves, how can we commit ourselves more fully as individuals, as families, as a church, to living out our response to what God in Christ has done for us.

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