

Pastor Joe Polzin  
 Mark 14:22-25  
 “Eyes on Jesus – *More Than Meets the Eye*”  
 Year A – Maundy Thursday  
 April 9, 2020

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

The thought or sight of blood makes many people squeamish. Many don’t like to think about it, or hear about it, especially how often it comes up in the Bible. For instance, there’s blood all over the place in our Scripture Readings today. Perhaps the bloodiness of the day strikes you as odd, or primitive, or even a bit unsettling. But, today, Maundy Thursday, we need to look under all this blood by hearing the Word of God and finding out that there’s more than meets the eye.

Our Old Testament Reading sets the stage for the first Passover. The Lord had sent nine plagues on Egypt, where his people were enslaved under Pharaoh; and the Passover marked the tenth and final one. To every house that was not protected by the blood of consecrated lambs, the Lord came and struck down the firstborn son. But for those whose houses *were* marked by the blood of a lamb, the Lord caused the Destroyer to pass over.

This was such a momentous occasion that God commanded his people to celebrate the Passover annually as a memorial meal. Moses told the people, “When you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. 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 in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses’” (Exodus 12:25–27a).

Take a hard look at the Passover. Dwelling only on the blood and violence, it might cause us to stumble. It shocks our peaceable sensibilities. What kind of God would perpetrate such wrath against so many people? And doesn’t it seem morbid or cruel to memorialize such a bloody and gory event?

Now look deeper. There’s more here than meets the eye. After Moses announced the institution of the Passover, we’re told, “The people bowed their heads and worshiped” (Exodus 12:27b). They recognized that when the Lord speaks his will, the only proper response is worship. The Passover is all about the First Commandment: “You shall have no other gods.” The Lord had said concerning the Passover, “On all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD” (Exodus 12:12). The tenth plague was his divine warfare against the false gods of Egypt, against those who refused to trust in him as the true God, and against the oppressors of his people so that he might save them.

And later in Exodus, God said this: “I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me” (20:5). This means that under all that Egyptian blood, we should not see innocent victims of a capricious god, but rather impenitent sinners receiving the just judgment from the one, true Holy God. And all of God’s judgments on idolaters—from the flood to the Passover to the conquest of Canaan—are intended to warn us about the consequences of idolatry and refusing to repent of our sins. They are previews of the final judgment that is coming on the Last Day.

We should also be very clear, that this judgment *is* what we deserve, and more. For our idolatrous sins, for every time we have not feared, loved, and trusted in the Lord our God with all our heart, we deserve for the Destroyer to come and spill our blood, and for our soul to be taken swiftly to eternal punishment. The Lord is no tame God just because we want him to be. The

Apostle Paul, known for his writing about God's grace, also wrote this: "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

Now, for their own sins, the Israelites deserved the same fate as the Egyptians. But now look at the blood of the Passover lambs and see more there than meets the eye. To the naked eye, the blood of lambs appears to be nothing more than simple blood, but God attached his Word of grace to it and gave it to his people as a way to be saved from the Destroyer. Although there is no inherent merit or worthiness in the Israelites, under the blood of the Passover lambs, God mercifully and graciously promises to deliver them.

So, the Passover was to be celebrated by Israel above all as a remembrance of God's choosing of Israel and of his protection and salvation for them from their enemies. Later, the Lord would attach this same Word of grace to all the blood of the lambs, goats, and bulls used in the sacrificial system operated by the priests at the tabernacle and later the temple. Through the pouring out of blood in the Most Holy Place, God provided another means of cleansing and forgiveness for his people's sins. As the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (9:22).

And so, all of this is the historical backdrop to the events in the Upper Room on the night when Jesus was betrayed, where again, we find more than meets the eye. This was a Passover Meal, the meal that the Israelites had celebrated for over a thousand years. So, to the disciples, Israel's deliverance from Egypt was certainly in view, and the recently shed blood of Passover lambs would still be fresh on their minds. Surely they had celebrated this meal dozens of times with their families from childhood on, and they knew the Passover liturgy by heart. And they thought they knew what was coming as they celebrated it with Jesus, but on this night, there would be way more than meets the eye for them, when Jesus, the Lord of Israel now in the flesh, revises the Passover liturgy.

Mark writes, "As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them" (14:22). So far, so good; no surprises yet. But here's the moment: Jesus said over the bread, "Take; this is my body" (v. 22). The disciples may have looked at one another with bewildered glances. Then Jesus seems to slip back into the regular liturgy: "He took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it." Okay, back to normal, the disciples may have thought. But then another surprise! Jesus said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (v. 24). Or, as the Greek is sometimes translated: "poured out on behalf of the masses."

At this unprecedented Passover Meal, Jesus teaches three main things to his disciples. First, that in a short while, his body would be given and his blood would be shed on the cross—and that under the apparently senseless killing of a Righteous Man, they should see his death as a ransom on behalf of the masses of humanity, for the sins of the whole world. This is God's final judgment on sin, and from that day forward, the only sin that condemns is still idolatry, specifically the idolatry of rejecting Jesus and what his death meant for us.

Second, Jesus teaches that in a mysterious and supernatural way, there was more than meets the eye under the simple bread and wine of an ordinary Passover Meal—now, by the power of his Word, the bread was truly his body and the wine was truly his blood, given to his disciples for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Furthermore, when he said, "Do this," he instituted the Lord's Supper for his Church to do, in order to proclaim his death until he comes again (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:26).

And third, Jesus was teaching them that the Passover and the sacrificial system of Israel were types, or prefigurements, of his once-for-all sacrificial death on the cross. All of it foreshadowed and pointed forward to Jesus, and now these Old Testament ceremonies were giving way to the New Testament in his blood.

John the Baptist had pointed to Jesus and proclaimed, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Later, the Apostle Paul would write, “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7). And on Good Friday, we see God’s spotless Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, finally offer his life as a ransom for the masses, so that sinners like us *don’t* get what we deserve, but instead we get what Jesus has earned for us by his holy and precious blood.

And what is in that blood that doesn’t meet the eye? Life! The blood of Jesus delivers to us the forgiveness of sins and serves as our antidote to death. “For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation,” as the Catechism says. When you come in faith to Jesus to feed on his body given and his blood shed for you, Jesus promises, “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:54).

Now, something that I haven’t mentioned yet is the fact that today is Maundy Thursday, and it’s the day when we would normally be gathering as the Church, around the Lord’s Table. The day when, after hearing about the Jesus instituting the Lord’s Supper, and all the benefits that we gain from this holy Sacrament, we then receive Jesus’ body and blood in the bread and the wine. But this year is quite different, isn’t it? Last week, I sent out a letter to our congregation on the topic of communion and addressed several issues surrounding it given our current times.

But the main point is this: that we are in a time that has been experienced before at different moments in Church history, where, for different reasons, the Lord has appointed that his Church is unable to gather around this meal. We pray that this time of fasting from the Lord’s Supper is ended soon. But it’s not a fast that we have chosen, we don’t have the right to do decide when to start it or stop it. It’s one that the Lord has appointed for us. And so, in this fast, as difficult as it is to be away, we may utilize this time to repent and pray and long for the time when we are not only receiving communion again, but gathering with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ around his table.

And until then, he has given us other great blessings. Although we may not be able to receive his grace in the Lord’s Supper right now, he has provided his Church with other means of grace. We have our Baptism, which wasn’t a one-time event. We daily receive God’s baptismal blessings of faith and grace because we are always living as his baptized children.

And we also have God’s Word, the Scriptures. The Word today, which reminds us that although we may not be physically receiving Christ’s body and blood, we still know he offered his body and blood for us on the cross as the Lamb of God for the forgiveness of our sins. And the Holy Spirit works through our hearing of this Word today, truly works the forgiveness of sins within our hearts, and strengthens our faith in Jesus Christ.

As we begin to see our Lord take his final steps to his cross, and to the tomb, and then back out of the tomb on Easter morning, may we be assured that, when it comes to God and the way he works on our behalf to save us, there is always more than meets the eye. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, these next few days, and certainly our whole lives, as we see all that he has won for us—the forgiveness of our sins, our eternal life with him, and our salvation, now and always. In Jesus’ name. **Amen.**

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