

Christ: Here Now, and on the Way

Sermon for Maundy Thursday – Exodus 12:1-14



“¹The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ²“This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. ⁴And 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. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, ⁶and 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. 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. ⁸They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. ¹⁰And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹In 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. It is the Lord’s Passover. ¹²For 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 judgments: I am the Lord. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for 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. ¹⁴“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast.”

It was a tense situation back then, when Moses was about to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. After nine plagues, Pharaoh’s stubbornness had only grown worse. Either a massive collapse was inevitable, or he would have to do the unthinkable and set the Israelites free. Then came the message from God. The Israelites were told to do something that didn’t really make sense to anyone. They were to slaughter a lamb and apply its blood to the doorposts. Once they did that, the angel of death would not enter that house but would pass over it.

For us today, the story of the Israelites and the Passover is hard to understand. Why did the people have to slaughter a lamb, and why did its blood have to be visible on the doorpost? One would think that an angel sent directly by God wouldn’t need a bloody mark on a door to find the right address. Could it be that even angels make mistakes...?

However, if we focus on the essentials, we see that the story of the Israelites remains highly relevant today, even across centuries. The Passover was and remains greatly significant for the Jews to this day. When Jewish fathers celebrate the Seder, they don’t say, “We do this in remembrance of times past.” No, they say, “God has delivered us!” even though they were not actually there when Moses led God’s people out of Egypt.

The Passover is also of great significance for us Christians. It was during this very Passover that Jesus sat at the table with His disciples and said, “I have eagerly desired to eat this meal with you!” When Jesus was sacrificed on the cross, as the Gospel of John testifies, it happened at the very

moment when the Passover lambs were being slaughtered. What does all this mean for us? What does the Passover meal of Moses mean, and what does it have to do with Holy Communion, which we will celebrate together again today? I would like to explore this today using three points: 1) the Passover meal proclaims that our God is a God of place, 2) it proclaims that our God is a God of community, and 3) it proclaims that our God is a God of the journey.

First: Our God is a God of place. Many people come to us and ask, “How does one become a Christian?” “What rules must I learn?” and “What is the requirement for being a true Christian?” These people expect that Christianity, like many religions, aims to provide a rulebook or offer a new philosophy, but that is not true. Our God is not found through ideas, but through places. He did not tell Moses that from now on they should all recite a mantra. Nor did He say what they should or should not do. They had to do only one thing: paint the doorposts with the blood of a lamb. What seems extremely strange to us in the modern age is actually at the heart of our faith. The angel of death did not go past every house asking who lived there and how worthy those people were. He looked only at the blood on the door.

Our God is a God of place. He came to us in, with, and under history. He spoke through specific people at a specific time. He announced the one Christ who would come at a certain time, and ultimately appeared through this very Christ. It is therefore no coincidence that, shortly before His death, Christ did not leave His disciples a list of rules, but a specific place: “Take and eat, this is my body. Take and drink, this is my blood.”

Second: Our God is a God of community. This place is not meant for just one person. Moses instructed the people of Israel at that time to eat the entire lamb. If the lamb was too large for a small family, they were to share it with their neighbors. The crucial point is that they were to actually eat the lamb. Jesus refers directly to this when He says to His disciples, “Take and eat. Take and drink.” The meaning here is also physical. It was not enough to simply agree. It would not have been acceptable if an Israelite had said, “I agree that we should eat the Passover lamb, but I am a vegetarian and will therefore only participate spiritually.” Every Israelite took part. This shared participation also united them with one another.

When we come to the Lord’s Supper it means first and foremost that we are united with Christ. In the Lord’s Supper, Christ Himself comes to us. He who sits at the right hand of the Father is at the same time here with us, truly present. Because He unites me with Himself and at the same time also unites my fellow Christians with Himself, he also unites me with my sisters and brothers in Christ.

Third: Our God is a God of the journey. The Israelites of that time were about to set out. They were instructed to stay ready with their sandals on their feet and their staff in their hands, like those who were about to depart and ready to set out in haste. They were on their way out of bondage. Jesus and His disciples were also on the move. The betrayer had risen from the table. He was on His way to betray Jesus. Jesus Himself went to the Mount of Olives, then things would take their course.

One of the things the people ate at the Passover meal was bitter herbs. This was meant to serve as a reminder. Not only was captivity bitter, but the path to freedom was bitter as well. There would be days when the people longed for the meat pots of Egypt, days when the whole idea of the exodus would be called into question, and even God would be doubted. The Lord’s Supper is also a meal of the journey. We celebrate it in anticipation of Jesus who is coming “until he comes.” When Jesus comes, we will celebrate the Lord’s Supper directly with Him. Now, Christ is veiled in bread and wine, yet truly present. Later, we will see Him face to face. The Lord’s Supper strengthens us here and now in faith and opens our eyes to the One who is returning to us.

There was an eerie atmosphere when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and one of them then came to betray Him. We cannot deny this eeriness. It also affects us today when we receive the body and blood of Christ, thereby sharing in His suffering and death. Yet we do this knowing that He will return in glory. Christ is fully present with us at the Lord's Supper. He grants us fellowship with Himself and with the many and then sends us on our way. We do not remain stagnant. Our gaze upon all those who are lost drives us out: to speak with them, to invite them, and to tell them about Christ. With our loins girded, our shoes on our feet, and our staff in hand we go out to meet the One who is returning to us: Jesus Christ.

Maranatha—Lord, come! Come quickly. Amen.