

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one whose blood washes you clean and redeems your soul for God, amen.

It sure feels great to be back. We had a really fun vacation where we did some amazing things. We hiked around the western rim of the Grand Canyon and got way too close to the edge. We walked on the Grand Canyon Skywalk, a horseshoe shaped platform made out of glass that sticks out over the canyon. When you look down you see just how big a hole in the ground the Canyon is. You also get a sense of how truly grand the God is who made all of it... It's also good to be back here inside our beautiful sanctuary where we all have so many wonderful memories of weddings, baptisms, confirmations, and even the sad memories of saying our farewells to loved ones, all these precious memories, right here within these walls. This church, and the memories made here, have been one of the major influences that formed you into the person you are today. Many of the Churches I've attended in the past were much younger than Trinity. The Church I served in West Milton turned 50 when I was there. My home congregation in Fairborn is even younger than that. In those two congregations there are numerous founding members still living. They can tell and retell the story of how their congregation began. My friend Skip, whose mother was the organist at Saint Mark's Lutheran Church in Fairborn used to tell me that on her final Sunday playing for Saint Mark's, before starting the very next week at Abiding Christ, her

final sending hymn was “On Our Way Rejoicing.” The scars from that church split were still healing when they celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary a couple of years ago. Saint Mark’s closed its doors permanently this year. I’ll bet the hurt feelings and the musings of what might have been if the congregation could have held itself together those years ago are still present in the hearts of the St Mark’s congregation today. For good or bad our experiences shape who we are today.

The story of the Passover is one of those defining stories that formed a group of despairing people into God’s Chosen Nation. The story of Passover is technically called a story of redemption, but it’s also a formative story that gives the Hebrew people a common narrative, not only of the birth of a nation, this story creates the People of God. Set within the larger story of the Exodus from slavery to the freedom of the promised land, the story of the Passover we just read is a small part of the greater story of how God liberated these chosen people from their bondage to slavery in Egypt. At a family Passover meal today the youngest child will ask, “Why is this night different from every other night? Why do we recline, eat roasted lamb, and bitter herbs. Why must we eat with our coats and hats on? All these questions lead the oldest member of the Jewish family to retell the story of the Exodus of the Hebrew people out of their bondage by the mighty acts of God. Before we pick up the story, God has already sent nine plagues in an effort to convince the Egyptian King to release the Hebrews so they could worship the Lord

God. Pharaoh, of course refused all nine attempts. Finally, God gives Moses and Aaron the instructions for this Passover meal. The crucial part of the instruction includes this odd requirement to paint the door posts with the blood of a blemish free lamb, slaughtered in the prime of its life. They are ordered to eat the flesh of this perfect sacrificial lamb and to not leave any leftovers. That night when the angel of death passed through Egypt and took every firstborn from every family, even the family of Pharaoh. Every firstborn was killed except those families where the blood of the perfect sacrificial lamb was painted over the door.

The part of the story I read today was actually written much later in the life of those same Hebrew people. It was written when they were in captivity in Babylon. Bible scholars say these instructions were written down by a Jewish priest to help the Jewish people remember all God had done. The detailed instructions for how and when to celebrate this Passover meal continued to form and reinforce the faith of those Jewish people even though they were exiled from their homeland and the temple where they had so many memories was destroyed. This reenactment every year of the Passover not only united them, the ritual gave them order and something to put their faith in, despite their current situation where they were foreigners in a foreign land. The symbolic meal keeps them connected to each other, but also keeps them connected to their faith traditions and their ancestors in the faith. Even more than all of that, the Passover meal keeps the

Jewish nation connected to God. They remember and participate in the liberation of their people every time they eat the Passover meal.

In the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke Jesus was eating the Passover meal with his disciples on the night before he was betrayed. In our Church calendar that would put it on what we call today, Maundy Thursday. On the same day the ancient Hebrew people slaughtered their perfect, blemish free sacrificial lamb, whose blood protected them from the angel of death, Jesus took bread, blessed it and gave it for all to eat. After eating, he took the common cup of wine and also blessed it. Then he gave it to them to drink. Jesus said this new covenant in his blood was for the forgiveness of sins. The blood of the lamb spared those ancient Jewish families from experiencing the death of all their firstborn children, but the blood of Jesus spares all of mankind from the wages of sin which is permanent separation from our God. Among other names, we call this new ritual given to us by Jesus himself, the Last Supper because it was the last time Jesus would celebrate the Passover with his disciples. This new Last Supper, instituted by Jesus, does many of the same things for us Christians as the Passover does for Jewish people. It forms our faith. It unites us with all other Christians from every place and every time, including all the beings in heaven, who, according to the Book Revelations, drop what there are doing and gather around the throne to worship God, every time we celebrate the Last Supper of Jesus. In

faith we're eating the flesh and drinking the blood of our Paschal Lamb and that very precious blood of Jesus washes us clean from all our sins. Jesus was our perfect sacrificial lamb, slaughtered in the prime of his life to redeem us from the consequences of our Sin. One of the prayer options we have in our Lutheran Communion Liturgy says we believe by partaking of this sacred meal we are proclaiming Jesus is Lord over everything, even death itself. So, as often as we celebrate Holy Communion we are proclaiming Jesus death and resurrection until he comes again. It's a way of participating in the very actions that saved us and that formed us into the Church, which is the earthly Body of Christ.

How many of you have participated in a Christian Seder Meal? I try to offer it every other year for our Confirmation families so that our confirmands can get the sense of our deep roots in the Jewish faith. I love hosting the Christian Seder because in one evening we get to participate in the Bible's two biggest and best stories of redemption. In a Christian Seder, we eat the flesh of a lamb that represents the lamb sacrificed for the Hebrew people's freedom to worship, the lamb that paid the price for the Jewish people to escape their bondage to slavery. Just like the Passover meal forms the people of God, the Chosen ones, into a community, the Last Supper or Holy Communion, forms us into the Christian faith community. Just like the Passover meal redeemed the Jewish people from their bondage to slavery, Holy Communion redeems us from our bondage to sin, death,

and the devil. Instead of consuming a blemish free lamb that won the Hebrew people's freedom from old Pharaoh, the flesh and blood of Jesus takes away our sin and brings us into a right relationship with God.

If a pregnant lamb dies in childbirth, a good shepherd will take the motherless baby lamb and wash it in a small amount of the blood of another healthy mother lamb. Because this healthy lamb can smell its own blood on the newborn, it will take the motherless baby and raise it as its own. I believe that's exactly what happens when we participate in Holy Communion. We are washed in the blood of our savior, Jesus, and because of Jesus' righteousness, because Jesus was our sinless, blemish free sacrificial lamb, God recognizes us as God's own sons and daughters. God doesn't smell the stench of our sin, he only sees and smells his Son, Jesus.

Yes, it is so good to be back here in this place where our individual stories connect with the overarching story of God's people. May this story of the Passover remind us of our roots deep in the Jewish faith. May our participation in the sacred rituals and sacraments, along with our sisters and brothers in Christ from every time and every place unite us with each other and with all the saints who have gone before us. As we are joined with this vast cloud of witnesses, may our own faith be formed and strengthened so we never tire of proclaiming Jesus life, death, and resurrection, until he comes again. Come quickly Lord Jesus, Amen!