

Proper 18 A

Exodus 12, 1-14

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My first introduction to the final plague of Egypt when death passed over the Israelites, wasn't in church. It was through Cecil B. DeMille's epic movie *"The Ten Commandments"*. I still vividly remember death portrayed as this greenish-gray seeping mist descending from the night sky, and the door posts and lintels marked with blood. Inside the house of Moses, several families gathered waiting for death to pass them by. Some were seen packing, others tensely eating bread and herbs, jumping at every cry in the streets. The children just appeared bewildered by what was going on and the tension that permeated throughout the house. And Moses? He sat at the table, calmly praying.

Aaron's son asks, "Why is this night different than all others?"

Moses replies, "Because this night, the Lord our God will deliver us from the bondage of Egypt."

What we didn't see is that every other Israelite who believed in Moses message that God would deliver them from bondage, were also doing the same things as those in the house of Moses. They had killed a lamb, using its blood to mark their doorposts and lintels so that death would pass them by. Neighbors gathered in a home to share a roasted lamb together. The bread they ate was unleavened as it was quick to make and consume. With their meal were bitter herbs to eat, reminding them of the bitterness of their bondage which was soon to come to an end. They were as prepared as they could be for what was to come.

Whether you learned this story in Exodus through the movies, study, or church, what you were learning was the story of the first Passover. As the Lord said to Moses, "This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance." The Exodus story and Passover celebration are part of the Jewish identity and tradition. The yearly retelling of their freedom from bondage to the Egyptians reminds them of their roots and provides opportunity to reflect on how it has shaped them as people of God. It binds them together as a community of faith.

An important part of Passover is the seder meal. The seder, which literally means order, is a festive meal shared by family and friends. There are readings from the book of Exodus and ceremonial foods including wine, bitter herbs, and matzah. It is a choreographed meal that takes those attending from slavery to freedom.

Long ago and faraway, before I heard the calling to become a deacon, I was the Christian Formation Director here at St. Michael's. As my first Holy Week rolled around, people began telling me that we needed to have a seder meal. My first response was, "But we aren't Jewish." Under continued pressure, I went down the rabbit hole of a seder. The deeper I went, the

parallels between a seder and our Eucharist began to emerge until one day, a blazing light bulb came on- we celebrate a version of a seder every Sunday when we celebrate Holy Eucharist. Certainly, there are differences, but it is the similarities that stand out.

There is an order to our festival day as we celebrate the fulfillment of God's promise of deliverance from death through Jesus Christ. We read the stories of God's people and our salvation history, reminding us of our roots. There is prayer and opportunity to reflect on how the past has shaped into who we are today and to consider how God is calling to us as we move into the future. We drink wine and eat unleavened bread in remembrance that Christ died for us. Our Eucharist prayers take us from the slavery of sin to our release from sin's bondage that was made possible by the blood of our Paschal Lamb, Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is part of our Christian identity. It binds us together as a people of God and a community of faith.

On that Passover night in Egypt, everything was going to change. The Israelites found themselves venturing into the unknown. Forty years they wandered, but what bound them together was their faith and trust in God. There were some rocky times on their journey. An understatement to be sure, but we are, after all, human. Through all the changes and trials that they faced, the yearly Passover celebration kept them, and future generations grounded as a people, reminding them of what was and helping them to look forward to the future.

Since COVID-19 threw the world into turmoil, we have been venturing through the unknown, trying to find our new normal. And we are still looking, trusting in God's guidance as we move forward. Today at St. Michael's is a day when things are changing once again. For the first time in three years, we are having two services on Sunday morning. There may be some concern that moving to two services will separate us into two different communities. This isn't so. We are bound together as one community of faith as we gather at Christ's table for our Eucharistic festival meal.

Two Sunday's ago, we sang the hymn, "I Come with Joy to Meet My Lord" (The Hymnal 1982, #304). The words of this hymn speak of how our Eucharist, our Christian Passover meal, makes us one in Christ.

I come with joy to meet my Lord,
forgiven, loved, and free,
in awe and wonder to recall
his life laid down for me.

I come with Christians far and near
to find, as all are fed,
the new community of love
in Christ's communion bread.

As Christ breaks bread and bids us share,
each proud division ends.
The love that made us makes us one,

and strangers now are friends.

And thus with joy we meet our Lord.
His presence, always near,
is in such friendship better known:
we see and praise him here.

Together met, together bound,
we'll go our different ways
and as his people in the world
we'll live and speak his praise.

Together met; together bound. Whether you attend our early service or our late, whether you join us online or are away from home and worship wherever you are, we are one body in Christ, bound together through the Paschal feast of the Eucharist. Things change. But the Eucharist grounds us, reminding us of God's unchanging, deep, and abiding love for us. It is a love that we are called to share with each other and with the world. How we function together as a community is incumbent upon us. We must choose to do the necessary work and commitment to remain connected and support each other in our life in Christ.

Christ our Passover sacrificed himself for us. May we be willing to make our own sacrifices to work together in service to Christ's commandment to love one another. As we keep the feast, may we remember that we are all one community, united by the love of Christ.

Amen.