

March 9, 2011
Sermon for Ash Wednesday
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Exodus 12:21-23 (ESV)

²¹ Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. ²² Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. ²³ For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you.

1

¹ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

During the 16th Century, the Dutch fought with all that they had for their independence from Spain. After one of their battles, a rather bloody one, the Spanish succeeded in establishing control over the city of Rotterdam. After the battle, they systematically moved through the town, from house to house, seeking out all of the Dutch citizens that they could find, only so slaughter them and drag their corpses out into the streets.

As the sounds of the death march drew closer to a particular house where a number of Dutch civilians had hidden out, one of them had an idea. He killed the family milk goat, and collected it's blood. He then poured the blood one the floor inside the entryway and swept the blood under the door and into the street.

When the Spanish soldiers approached the house and noticed the blood coming from under the door and into the street, one of them said: "Let's move on, our work had already been done at this house. Look at the blood from the slaughter." The soldiers passed over the house and continued their killing at the next house.

The sight of blood is usually not a pretty sight. Some people faint at the sight of it. Many don't like movies with blood and gore. Even the thought of the blood in the story I just told might have grossed someone out. And yet...

Blood can mean life and salvation to someone facing death. Think about those Dutch citizens for whom the goats blood saved their lives. I try to give

blood whenever possible to help unknown people who may need it because of an accident or in surgery. A donor's blood can mean the difference between life and death. Shed blood can mean death, but it can also make a difference in life too. Leviticus 17:11 tells us: *"the life of the flesh is in the blood."*

Your eternal life is in blood too. The Blood of Jesus. 1 John 1:7 tells us: *"the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."* It is not a group of Spanish soldiers that are after us, but rather, it is sin that brings death. Yet God had mercy upon us. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins. Jesus willingly shed His blood for us on the cross of Calvary to forgive our sins, and as Dr. Martin Luther observed, "Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."

We arrived at the Ash Wednesday service to be marked, through faith, with the life-giving blood of Christ. This being marked with blood is nothing new for the people of God. It goes way back, not only to Jesus 2,000 years ago, but some 3,500 years ago when God rescued the people of Israel from slavery and oppression in Egypt, the first Passover.

While none of us has ever been in slavery, let's try to picture the situation. Slowly but surely, the Egyptian overlords were destroying the people of Israel, who had become their slaves. The Egyptians continued to demand more and more from them, while the same time killing their male babies in order to reduce their numbers (Ex 1:8-16). The Israelites cried out to God, and He heard them and chose Moses to lead them out of their slavery.

Moses told the Egyptian leader, the Pharaoh, to let God's people go, but the king refused. To change Pharaoh's mind, God sent plagues upon the Egyptians, nine of them to begin with. Sometimes Pharaoh promised to release the Israelites, yet he quickly changed his mind when God removed the plague.

Finally, God told the people of Israel to get ready to leave the country on the night when then final, most dreadful plague would befall the land. The angel of death would pass through the land, killing every firstborn, from mankind to animals in the land of Egypt. But, the angel of death would *pass over* every household where the doorway was marked with the blood of the lamb. (Ex 11-12)

On the 14th day of the first month, every Israelite family dipped a branch of hyssop into the blood of the lamb they had slain and painted that blood on the top and sides of the doorframe. It may have looked gross, it may have smelled bad, but in doing so, the angel of death passed over that house, sparing those inside of it. The next morning the Israelite slaves left Egypt, and ever since their descendants have remembered the Passover as their salvation event.

Years later, Jesus and His disciples gathered together in the Upper Room to celebrate their ancestors great deliverance. Surely they must have reflected on that wonderful night back in Egypt so many years ago. But Jesus also was looking *ahead* to an even greater deliverance. The next day He would sacrifice *His own* blood. As the Israelites many years before had stained the horizontal and vertical beams of the doorframe with the blood of the Passover lamb, Jesus, God's holy and sinless Son, the Lamb "who takes away the sin of the world"

(John 1:29) would stain the horizontal and vertical beams of the cross, with His own sinless blood.

This was years after the first Passover and the night before Jesus would forever replace the sacrifice of the Passover lambs with His own sacrifice, when Jesus took a cup of wine used in the Passover ceremony and gave it to His disciples saying *“Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”* (Mt 26:27b-28) In doing so, Jesus in effect was saying “Like Pharaoh of long ago, you too have heard God’s commands and have disregarded them, following your own plans. You too have oppressed people, if not enslaving them, then by resenting them, neglecting them, speaking ill of them, in your community, at your workplace, in the classroom, even in your own home. Like Pharaoh, you have placed your desires and goals about God’s will. Surely My Father could condemn you as He condemned Pharaoh and the Egyptians, but My blood marks you as My own. Left to yourselves, you are doomed to death and destruction. But as the sacrificial lambs blood marked your ancestors, My blood will mark you for life. Death and hell cannot destroy you. My Father sees My blood on you who believe in Me and His wrath passes over you...to the cross. The judgment of death and eternal condemnation that you deserve for your sin will be withheld. I, the true unblemished Lamb of God, mark you with My blood.”

Throughout the centuries on Ash Wednesday, the Christian church has provided another ritual to mark god’s people with ashes. Ashes are a Biblical

symbol of penitence and mortality. We wear them to admit that we are sinners, but also to profess our salvation through faith in Christ's sacrifice.

In 1927, a blood specimen was taken from a West African native named Asibi, who was sick with yellow fever. From his blood, a vaccine for yellow fever was identified. All of the vaccine manufactured since then derives from the blood specimen of this one man. Multiplied through repeated cultures in numerous labs, the vaccine from this one human being has offered immunity to millions of people throughout the world.

But the blood from another Man, a humble Man from Nazareth, has accomplished an infinitely greater deliverance. The blood of this one Man. God's Son, Jesus Christ, has immunized the whole world from the curse of sin. Believe in Him, receive the mark of His blood upon you, and in Holy Communion, eat His true body and drink His true blood, given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of all your sins. By His blood, you have the promise of life eternal, Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Adapted from the Lenten series: *Christ our Passover* by Rev. Dr. David Peter