

Sermon Heb. 9;11-22 Maundy Thursday 3-24-16 Pastor Schempf Zion Lutheran, Clyman, WI

After 400 years in Egypt the people of God needed to leave that dreadful place. Each day they were oppressed, mistreated, and abused. Each day was harder than the day before. Their life as slaves was all pain. Pharaoh personified the devil. He made their life one endless misery. When they cried to the Lord for mercy He heard them. In His love He sent Moses as their deliverer. Moses' message to Pharaoh came straight from God: "Let my people go." You know what happened. God sent a series of plagues. Each plague intensified the pressure. Each one was worse than the last with greater consequences and deeper devastation. After each plague Pharaoh would momentarily yield only to change his mind the moment the plague ended. After nine plagues Egypt had been decimated. All crops and vegetation had been destroyed by locusts or hail. Every Egyptian had suffered boils upon their bodies. Total darkness, an epidemic of frogs, an onslaught of flies and gnats, cattle disease... the plagues kept coming one after the other. No people, before or since has ever endured nine successive nation-wide disasters like they did. But after each plague Pharaoh decided to hang tough. He kept refusing to let Israel go. The last plague would be the most devastating of all. "and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh, who sits on his throne, even to the first-born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; all the first born of the cattle as well. Moreover there shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt, such as there has not been before and such as shall never be again." It would be a night of unprecedented wailing all across Egypt. When it happened, "there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no home where there was not someone dead." But Israel escaped death that night. Once again, God had passed over them. Once again they saw how God made a distinction between them and the Egyptians. They were set apart and protected from death through an act of faith. God instructed each household to take an unblemished male lamb, a year old, and kill it on the appointed day at twilight. They were to take some of the lamb's blood and put it on the doorposts and lintels of their houses. Then they would roast the meat, eat it with unleavened bread, and be ready to leave quickly with their sandals on their feet and their staff in their hands. This was the Passover. The blood of the lamb was vital. Without that blood of the lamb on the doorposts there was no protection from death. Every home without the blood on the doorposts experienced death that night. Israel was to never forget this mighty and merciful, act of God for them. They were to celebrate the Passover meal every year to remember God's deliverance.

It was that meal that Jesus ate with His disciples the night before He was executed. But Passover wasn't the only time that the shedding of blood was on the minds of God's people. Shed blood was at the heart of all their worship. It was integral to their understanding of God. Shed blood symbolized the substitutionary work that would be accomplished by the Messiah. While the blood of animals served its purpose it had its limitations. To actually be made right with God takes more than the blood of an animal. The blood of a lamb on the doorposts of the

house saved them on one particular night in Egypt. But the blood of all the lambs sacrificed that night in Egypt, the blood of all the lambs and all the other animals that were sacrificed over the centuries could never actually take away sin. Those animal sacrifices had limited benefit. There were intended to be only temporary. They foreshadowed a greater sacrifice.

Think of the temporary nature of a life boat. When the Titanic sunk, those fortunate enough to make it onto a lifeboat knew that they would not be paddling their way back to land on those small vessels. The usefulness of the lifeboat was absolutely vital but also temporary and limited. Another passenger ship, the Carpathia, is the vessel that actually rescued them. In a similar way EMTs offer 'first aid' which is critical at the moment but not the kind of help that provides long term solution to an injury. Animal sacrifices were God's temporary solution to dealing with sin. The writer to the Hebrews states clearly, "but in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year, for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Hebrews contrasts the blood of Christ with the blood of animals. "For if the blood of goats and bulls and ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offer Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? Animals did not have the spirit of God within them when they were sacrificed... but Jesus did, making His a spiritual sacrifice. Animals did not die willingly, Jesus did. Any lamb no matter how spotless they appeared could not be a pure and Holy sacrifice like Jesus. No animal sacrifice could motivate anyone to serve God with a clear conscience because animals are just animals, and animals come cheap. But the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, that's another story. That you are bought with the blood of God's Son means you have enormous value. Our text declares how much more the blood of Christ "cleanses your conscience to serve the living God." Animal sacrifice served their purpose... but they foreshadowed something greater. They were symbolic but they didn't really get the dirt of sin out. Only the blood of Jesus could remove sin.

So here is the heart of the matter. People everywhere hope that upon death they will live with God in heaven. (Think of the phrase, 'All dogs go to heaven") Wishing is easy. But desiring something doesn't enable you to attain it. You can wish for all kinds of things. The question is do you have the way to obtain that which you desire? Wanting forgiveness of all your sins, wanting to have peace with God and eternal life with Him; those are worthy aspirations. But do you have the means? Can you come up with the price required? Listen to the words of 1 Peter 1 "know that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the precious blood of Christ." It is the blood of Jesus that is the full price paid to take away your sins and mine. It is His blood that establishes your worth. The shed blood of Jesus says you are exceedingly precious to God.

It is the very blood of Christ that He offers you tonight. His body and blood frees you from guilt. It cleanses your conscience from dead works and brings forth good works. It motivates you to serve the living God. The blood of lambs, and goats, and rams, and bulls was good; good for a time, but it wasn't good enough. It is the blood of Jesus that is the real offering for sin. In Holy Communion you taste His forgiveness, you experience His love in the most intimate and personal way. His body was given, His blood was shed for you. Thanks be to God. Amen.