

Last week we considered how Peter had quickly gone from correctly understanding the identity of Jesus... Messiah, Son of the living God... to wrongly trying to impose his imperfect, human purposes on Jesus' perfect Divine will... the **sacrificial love** of God made flesh in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Peter, both ‘Church Rock’ and ‘stumbling block’, showed both divine wisdom and human impetuosity in offering up both “right answers and wrong answers” with regards to the **true identity** of who Jesus truly was... and IS.’ As we identified with Peter how we too can, almost in the same breath, bring both great pride and equal disappointment to our Lord, we then explored some of Paul’s inspired ‘right answers’ in Romans 12 as to how to exhibit ‘Marks of the true Christian.’

Today’s Exodus and Romans passages speak further to those same themes of SACRIFICIAL LOVE and TRUE IDENTITY of Jesus. And while Paul will continue to build on last week’s theme of how we are to **“Let love be genuine,”** the other passage, from the second book of the O.T. Torah, the Jewish Books of the Law, is a much less-likely source to explore the love and nature of Jesus, the ‘star’ of the N.T. And yet, this description of the Passover is one of the more accurate portrayals of the fundamental nature of the ‘Lamb of God,’ the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Together with Paul’s words in Romans Ch. 13, we can learn even more about what it means to show the ‘marks of a true Christian’... as we further consider... **Right Answers, continued...**

As you heard Charlie/Sara read the words of God to Moses, did it perhaps bring to mind another time of the Christian year? Perhaps a ‘high holy day’ that some in the church may look forward to as much as those ‘highest’ days, Christmas and Easter? **Maundy Thursday.** The celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper as it was first observed in the Upper Room the night of Jesus’ betrayal. The meal that was recognized at that time as the Passover Meal. Also known as the Feast of the Unleavened Bread or the Feast of the First Fruits.

When considering whether or not to focus on this O.T. passage in the lectionary readings, one of the reasons I chose it was because when we read it during Holy Week, it only

receives a more abbreviated consideration. And yet, the Sacrament of Holy Communion... one of only TWO sacraments that we observe in our tradition... lies at the very core of OUR identity as Christians. Moreover, the Lord's Supper illuminates the true identity of **Jesus**. An understanding that is incomplete unless we more fully appreciate Him as the 'Passover Lamb!' As we read the words of Jesus at the meal with his disciples, we know that they are inextricably linked to the words of God to his follower Moses. The rich imagery we find in the 'Old' Testament helps us to appreciate the truths in the 'New' Testament in ways that are TIMELESS... together, these two stories concerning 'the blood of a lamb' remind us, in the words of Lamentations, ***"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness ('O Lord')"*** (3:22-23)

As I read over commentaries about this passage, there were a couple of thoughts that really struck me. One is that Exodus 12 is about 'blood and power.' The blood of Jesus shed FOR us, and the power of the Holy Spirit that dwells IN us. And the other was the manner in which the Jews, as followers of God, functioned both as FAMILY and as a NATION.

As to the latter point, from the very outset of this story, the imagery of FAMILY is very important. A lamb, whose blood will provide a shield of protection from death, is to be provided by the body of believers to each individual family. God said to Moses and Aaron ***"Tell the whole congregation of Israel that ...they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household."*** (Ex. 12:3)

Could this not be seen as a message TODAY of the obligation of the 'congregation' of the faithful... the CHURCH... to bring to every household, every family, the 'body and blood' of the Lamb... JESUS? How are we doing with bringing the saving message of our Lord Christ to families... who might be right next door?

And just who IS this 'family?' Just those homes with June and Ward Cleaver, 2.5 children, a dog and cat and a two-car garage? NO! God goes on to say that ***"If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it."*** (Ex. 12:4) The 'family' of God that we are to minister to includes ALL who are in need of a Savior. Single moms, retired couples, the sick and infirm in hospitals and nursing homes, rebellious teenagers, the homeless,

fast-food employees, bank tellers... the 'Lamb' is to be shared with each and every individual who will partake of him. And there is PLENTY of Jesus to go around! And plenty of hurting, lonely people who 'hunger and thirst' to be filled... and FUL-filled... to find the peace that only Jesus can bring.

God told Moses and Aaron that those families could be assured that when they identified their homes by the blood of the lamb, they would be spared death. ***"The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you..."*** (Ex. 12:13) They would be protected... saved. By trusting in the sacrifice of an unblemished, young male lamb. One who would be consumed by them after having been ***"roasted over a fire, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs."*** (Ex. 12:8, 11) And, that in doing so, they should ***"eat it hurriedly"***... dressed and ready to head out...Sandals on feet and staff in hand.

Why such attention to the 'food prep' and 'travel preparation?' Like so many images in the O.T., there is symbolism in those 'dietary details' that relate to our N.T. faith. 'Fire-roasted' refers to the fiery JUDGMENT of God. The 'leaven' that is important to leave out of the bread represents SIN. 'Bitter herbs' is a reminder of the bitter SUFFERING that this world can bring. That 'sacrificial Lamb' we know as **Jesus** endured much SUFFERING on our behalf. Even though he was without SIN... 'unblemished' by the world's brokenness. This He endured to take on the JUDGMENT that should have rightfully been ours to receive. And by virtue of our being saved from death by the blood of the Paschal Lamb, we must be ready to GO OUT to share this good news with others. That they too might put the 'mark' of Jesus on their own 'households'... in their own 'families.'

In gratitude for the **blood** of **Jesus** that was shed FOR us, we are to then go out in the **power** of the **Holy Spirit** that dwells IN us. With the debt of our sin paid by our Lord Christ, we are to help others to be relieved of the burdens that they carry. In the opening verse of today's passage from Romans, Paul says to ***"Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."*** (Rom. 13:8)

What is very interesting is what Paul is referring to when he says 'Owe no one anything.' If you go back to vs. 6-7, he says that as believers, we are to ***"pay taxes, for the authorities are***

***God's servants... Pay to all what is due to them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due.*** (Rom. 6-7)

WOW. Paul has gone from 'preachin' to meddlin'! He is saying that is not just our 'civic' duty, but our Christian duty, to pay taxes, eliminate debts, and give honor and respect to our public officials. For these ***"authorities are God's servants."*** Not merely 'public servants.' In the heat of this current election cycle, Paul's words are as timely in this 21<sup>st</sup> C. as they were in the FIRST Century...

According to him, there is only one 'debt' that we have that is NEVER to be 'liquidated'... that the only thing we are to 'owe' anyone is ***"to love one another."***

In so doing, we 'fulfill,' or 'obey,' all of the commandments in God's Law. (Bible!)

The Ten Commandments... the 'linchpin' of the Scriptures... basically govern two areas: our relationship with God (first 4), and with one another (next 6). Those 4 that Paul mentions... adultery, murder, stealing, covetousness (wanting what is others')... relate to how we serve SELF. How what WE want overrides what others NEED. To be loved.

After first loving God, 'Job #2' sums up how we are to 'reflect' that love: ***"Love your neighbor as yourself."*** A love that ***"does no wrong to a neighbor."*** (Rom. 13:9-10) And just who IS that neighbor? Look next to you... and then 'work your way out'...

And just as God spoke to Mo and Aaron as to the urgency of going out into the world... from 'captivity' to the 'wilderness'... so too does Paul speak to the Romans (and US!) of that same 'urgency.' ***"NOW is the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; <sup>12</sup> the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light..."*** (Rom. 13:11-12)

You've heard me say at the close of the Words of Institution for Holy Communion how when we observe that Sacrament, "we proclaim the saving death of our risen Christ until He comes again in glory." 'Whenever that may be.' Could be today. Paul reminds us 'salvation is nearer to us NOW than when we became believers. ***"The day is near."*** And we need to WAKE UP. To not be preoccupied with the 'works of darkness' of our everyday world, but ***"put on the armor of light."*** The 'armor' of God's Word, and Spirit. Which protects us through the 'Light'

that is within us. The 'Light of the World' Jesus. The 'Lamb' who was slain that we might not fear death. Or, LIFE!

Earlier I mentioned that the Exodus passage was about the Jews, a people of faith, who were both FAMILY and a NATION. They entered into captivity in Egypt as individual **families**, and through their journey in the wilderness, came to be a **nation**. Only as they followed God, who used stuttering, imperfect leaders like Moses to accomplish His purposes. A guy who was able to overcome his own shortcomings and doubts because he listened to God. He 'trusted' and 'obeyed.'

In the weeks to come, we will be choosing leaders of our towns, cities, states, and nation. Leaders who, along with all of the virtues they are quite quick to tell you about, are also imperfect, with their own shortcomings and doubts. May we be mindful of how our leaders, present and future, look to a strength and a 'vision' much greater than their own. And PRAY for them to do so...

Moreover, may we recognize our own responsibilities as 'leaders' in our community. How are WE taking care of our 'constituents?' How are we fulfilling our own individual roles as the "priesthood of ALL believers?" As we remember that our 'nation' is comprised of a myriad of 'families,' I would lift up this final quote: *"No nation can rise higher than the strength of its families."* Spoken by Gordon Hinckley, former President of BYU, to a national conference of mayors on Oct. 3, 1998.

His words are just as true today as they were 25 years ago. May we be ever mindful of how to build up the families in our communities... both 'conventional' and 'NOT-so-conventional.' How are you and I encouraging men, women, and children in their own personal 'journeys in the wilderness?' How are we reminding them that they are NOT alone... from both a human and Divine perspective? As we encounter, everyday, those who have questions... about God, or about the life God has given them... may we seek His wisdom and grace to offer others **"Right answers... continually!"** Never forgetting that the ultimate right answer is "JESUS." Who shows us how to fulfill God's Laws **[hold up Bible]:** "LOVE GOD... LOVE ONE ANOTHER." And may all of God's beautiful family say, "AMEN!"

**CHARGE:** As your charge I would leave you with the words of Paul we read earlier:

**The night is gone, the day is near.  
Let us then lay aside the works of darkness  
and put on the armor of light;  
let us live honorably as in the day;  
let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ...  
Who shows us how best to LOVE GOD... AND LOVE ONE ANOTHER.**

**BLESSING:** May the Creator who made the light... the Christ who is the light...  
and the Spirit who ignites the light within... abide with you and all creation now and always.

***Question for Reflection:***

How do you reconcile a God who would “strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals” (Exod. 12:12) with a God who would die for the sins of the entire world?