

Sermon 7 September 2014
Exodus 12:1-14 "Passover and Communion"

Prayer: God, this morning we remember how You rescued the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, and set them free to remember and worship You. We remember that You have also rescued us, setting us free from slavery to sin and selfishness, and giving us life in Jesus name. Amen.

For Christians around the world there is one way we know we belong together without needing any words to be understood – and that is the celebrating of Holy Communion. It is around the table of the Lord Jesus that he brings his followers into one family. His family, God's family.

We share communion because Jesus told us to. It was the time of his last meal with his disciples that he commanded us to remember him. Jesus disciple Matthew, wrote it this way: Matthew 26:26–29 (RSV)

26 Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." **27** And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; **28** for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. **29** I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

And so when we share communion **we remember Jesus** that he died for us and what that means for our salvation and eternal life. **When** we share we look back to before the time of Jesus; we eat and drink together in the now; *and* when we do that we are also sharing in the hope of the future. A time when God's authority will be the only one in the world and God's kingdom established so the entire world belongs in it.

The Christian tradition of communion is because **of Jesus and the last** meal he shared with his disciples. That's why we have lots of different names – Last Supper, Holy Communion, Holy Feast, Eucharist... all the names bring us back to a focus on it being a 'meal' with family and friends around a table, like in a home. There we are to remember Jesus and all he taught, all he lived for and all that he died for.

The last meal Jesus shared with his disciples was their Passover meal. It was and is a time of remembering God's faithfulness, **God's liberation**, and God's steadfast presence with his people from the time of Moses. What Jesus was sharing with his disciples began with what we heard read from Exodus this morning. In Jesus we – his followers, turn it from remembering what God did then to being about remembering what God in Christ Jesus, our Messiah did.

What God did in the time of Moses for his people – by leading them from slavery in Egypt and setting them free, **we believe Jesus does** for us. He leads us from slavery to sin, self and sets us free in him. I believe it is very important for us as a people of Jesus to know **where** we have come from so that we can understand why we do things now – **and so that we can trust** into the unknown of the future. For more than two thousand years we as Christians have been remembering Jesus' re-focus of this Passover event.

For Jesus and his people, Passover is a defining event in their history, perhaps the most important thing that ever happened in their coming to know what God wanted from them, and what God wanted **for them**. But the Passover itself happens almost the end of this important time, so I want to remind us of what happened immediately before it happened.

Moses had been born to a couple from the Hebrew tribe of Levi when the Hebrew people were slaves to the Egyptian Pharaoh. The Hebrew people had originally been invited into Egypt by Joseph who was at that time the 2nd most powerful person in Egypt. But after about 430 years the Egyptian rulers, the

Pharaoh's no longer remembered Joseph. They were scared of God's people and had made them slaves, a building force for the Pharaoh's places and pyramids. The people cried and cried for God to set them free. What we know is that about 430 years after Joseph, Moses was born. His life was protected until he grew into a man, he choose to accept his Hebrew heritage, and spent years out Egypt before God called him into ministry. This ministry was to set God's people free from slavery, take them out of Egypt and into the promised land.

But – if you remember Moses story it was a fight to make Pharaoh let the people go, Pharaoh needed his slaves and the battle of power for control of God's people can be understood as a battle between Moses (our) God and the gods of the Egyptians. YHWH – Moses God was more powerful, our God won, but only after the 10 plagues had afflicted Egypt with Moses stopping them before the final show of power – **the Passover**. Because the Passover was the *final battle* when the Pharaoh told the people they could to go – God's people have celebrated it ever since.

The details of the Passover were in our Bible reading, the consequence of it was horrendous, the first born male of **every household** – **not protected** by the blood of the sacrifice **died**. The impact on God's people meant they were forever changed. Their relationship with God was **forever changed**. From this moment they knew the cost of being chosen by God **and being God's first-born**. **They had life**, in a very real way they were born again this night, they were set free from slavery, and became God's firstborn's.

In the middle of the horror of this Passover night they were **also given** a gift of worship. In the middle of the battle for power and control, God through Moses took time to teach the people that even when life is falling apart around you; when death and destruction surround you; **when** the future you dreamed of and planned for is shattered before you – **you stop, you remember, and you worship God**.

This Bible passage says *even when horrible danger is ahead (and what could be worse than The Angel of Death visiting your house?), God told his people to stop, to remember what was happening and to worship properly not just that night, **but in every age to come**. Even for us Christians there is a sense that **every time we worship**, there is an echo of that night reminding us of what God did for His people on that terrible night. **How** he gave protection through the blood of the sacrifice and how they discovered just how much they were **loved**. So worship especially the Passover for the Hebrew people, and now for us the Last Supper / Communion remind us not only **who God is in the life** we share, but **who we are** as God's people, God's "first-born children".

The story of God and his people is always 2 way: What God does for us (*and* God always acts first,) and **what we do** because of what God has already done. On that Passover night God gave life to those protected by the blood of the sacrifice. As Christians we believe God gives us life, because we are protected by the blood of Jesus, he sacrificed his life for us. God in Christ acted; **what is** our response?

On that first Passover night **part** of the preparation was that the people had to be **dressed and ready to leave Egypt**. They were not *quietly walking forward* as we do in Church for communion, they were told to be dressed to escape/ flee/ run on foot, from what was one of the most successful armies in the world.

The **cost** of being chosen by God as his children is **high**. We have to be ready to run and leave behind a *life style* that we know and a *culture* that has surrounded us. **We have to be ready** to change and trust **God will** protect and provide all our needs.

The Bible tells us Moses people found it very hard to let go of the old ways – even though they were slaves. I think we know how hard it can be to let go of the life we had before we accepted Christ's life in us. **May the story** of the Passover and the gifts of worship and life it brings to us through Jesus, **inspire** us to **trust and be ready** to run. To run to share the good news that **Jesus gives life** to all who believe, now and forever, and that is why we celebrate his last Passover, our communion. Amen