

March 29, 2018 – Exodus 12:1-14 & Mark 14:12-26 (Maundy Thursday)

My wife enjoys cooking. I enjoy eating. It's a good relationship. I think that much is obvious. What may not be obvious is how much my wife enjoys cooking for people other than me and Emi.

You may have heard her talk about how much Thanksgiving is her favorite holiday. It's not just because she likes to eat the food. It's because she likes to cook it as well. Generally speaking, she really enjoys making a big meal for a whole bunch of people. Her family. My family. Whoever happens to be there. Making a giant meal is half the fun.

She's not alone in feeling that way. Many, many people enjoy cooking for others. They enjoy putting together big family meals for holidays or reunions or... just because. And that's not a recent thing. Preparing big communal feasts for friends and family is an ancient tradition. Going all the way back to the Bible.

As far as I can tell, the very first one recorded was served by Abraham. Who, out of pure hospitality, prepared a feast for three strangers who happened to show up at his door. Not even realizing that those men were, in fact, God himself and two angels in disguise. And there are many more recorded in the Bible.

And yet, when we think of sacrifices in the Bible, we often don't make this kind of connection to communal meals. That's because most sacrifices weren't. They weren't meals at all. And they certainly weren't shared with others.

Much more often, they were private acts performed at the Temple. Just you, the priest, and God. But that kind of makes sense. The whole point of an offering is that you take something of your own and you give it to God so that you remember how God has forgiven you. Personally. Individually. The whole thing is meant to be very, very private.

But then we get to the Passover and everything changes. The Passover is a completely different kind of sacrifice than the sin offerings that the people regularly gave. Because it's not personal. It's communal. It's something to be shared.

The people are commanded to take a lamb for each household. Not each person. A lamb for each family. And if the household is too small for an entire lamb, then they're supposed to join together with their neighbors. And make it a community event.

Most sacrifices in the Old Testament had two options for the offering: a sheep if you could afford it, or two doves if you couldn't. But not in the Passover. It's just a lamb. And the reason is because, if you couldn't afford a lamb, that's OK. You just find a neighbor who has extra and eat with them. The Passover has generosity and compassion sown into its very fabric.

Later on, when God specifies how the Passover is to be remembered on a yearly basis, he reinforces it as a family event. As a time when children and parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins all get together. And the children ask their elders what the meaning of this meal is. And the elders explain the faith to them. Explain how God rescued them from Egypt and brought them to the Promised Land.

It's really kind of an amazing thing to think about. Especially when you put it into context with what's going on outside their doors. Throughout Egypt, the firstborn sons of the Egyptians are dying. The firstborn animals of the Egyptians are dying. The destroyer is everywhere. There is death and weeping and grief all around them.

But inside their homes, there is family. And community. And generosity. And faith. And a people with belts fastened and sandals on their feet and staffs in hand.

Eating in haste, but also eating in joy. Because God is at work, freeing them from this land of slavery. Showing this Pharaoh, this man who thinks he's a god, what the power of the one true God can do for those whom he loves.

It's a remarkable image. It's no wonder God made it one of the chief festivals of the Israelites. Throughout the Old Testament, whenever the histories talk about the faithfulness – or unfaithfulness – of the people, one of the key indicators is whether or not the Passover was being celebrated. Israel's identity is defined by this meal.

It's a memorial of what God did for them. That this God who desires not the death of the wicked, would still kill so many for the sake of his people. And it's a memorial of God's covenant. The covenant he made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The covenant he made with Moses. And the covenant he made with the entire people of Israel. That he would be with them always and bring them into the Promised Land.

When you think about like that, it's not at all surprising that Jesus would institute his own meal on the night of the Passover festival. Because the Lord's Supper is much more like the Passover than it is like any of the other sin offerings of the Israelites.

Because, for one, it's not a private act. Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. We proclaim it. We don't quietly, privately do this in secret. Just you, me, and God. You walk up here, side-by-side with the rest of the congregation, and you make a proclamation that you are a sinner, but Jesus Christ died for you.

And you do it together. With your family. With your friends. With your community. As many pieces of bread come from one loaf, so you each come together as one body. Bound together by the body and blood of your Lord. Available to all. From least to greatest. Poorest to richest.

For, as Martin Luther once said near the end of his life, we are all beggars of God's Word. Beggars of his words of grace and mercy. We all depend on the generosity of our God to save us. To invite us to his table and welcome us into his family.

Because we won't survive out there without him. Out there is death and weeping and grief. Out there, all you'll see is God's judgment for sin raining down on people who are absolutely convinced they are their own gods. And they won't accept anything else until God proves how powerless they are and sends them to eternal death and destruction.

And frankly, you and I aren't much different. We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We've all set ourselves up as our own gods. We've all bowed down to the idols of the world. We are indeed beggars, with no right to what God offers us.

But that's how it's always been with God's people. It wasn't because Abraham was so righteous that God chose him to be the father of a great nation. It wasn't because the Israelites were so righteous that God brought them to the Promised Land. It wasn't because Israel and Judah were such righteous nations that God protected them from their enemies.

It was by grace they were saved. It is by grace you are saved. And this meal we celebrate together is a testimony of that grace. That God, in his incomprehensible love, would sacrifice not just a lamb, not just the firstborns of Egypt, but he would sacrifice his own firstborn Son to save you and me.

To make a new covenant. Sealed with his own blood. Poured out for many. For the whole world. That he will be with us always, to the very end of the age, and bring us to the Promised Land once again. That is the definition of undeserved grace.

Tonight, we gather together as a family, as a community, as the people of God, for our Passover. It's not a meal of unleavened bread and bitter herbs and roasted lamb. And it's not in memory of God freeing us from Egypt.

No, it's far better. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. And we do this as often as we eat and drink it in remembrance that it is His flesh and blood that we receive this evening. His flesh and blood given and shed for you that we may eat it together in the kingdom of God. A meal offered by the Son of God for the family of God. Eaten in the faith that God has saved us. Amen.