

Holy Thursday – 2020  
Exodus 12:1-14  
1 Corinthians 11:23-32  
Matthew 26:17-30

The Israelites were sheltering-in-place. Death was all around them. The blood of the Lamb was their only protection. This tenth plague would be devastating to all who were not huddled beneath their scarlet stained timbers. Doors; blood was smeared at the entry point to their homes, the most sanctified places in Egypt. Blood protected them from death. Where the pascal blood is poured, death's dread angel sheathes the sword. Not outside; not in the homes of the Egyptians, not in the vulnerable places where sinners went about their affairs, oblivious to what was coming.

Where do you want to be? Out hustling in the hi-ways and by-ways, vulnerable to the plague of death that sweeps through town after town. Or do you want to be in a sanctified place, a safe-house where the blood of the Lamb protects you from death? It was no game, this Exodus. Nine plagues had revealed that God was serious. Belligerently blind, Pharaoh absorbed body blow after body blow and still refused to let the slaves go free. Now there would be a cry so harrowing, so mournful that it would not, could not be replicated. "There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again" (Exodus 11:6).

Deliverance, for the Israelites, would come through death. Let my people go. The land of bondage and slavery would release those held by Pharaoh. Like Jonah being vomited out of the great fish upon the dry land (Jonah 2:10), so Egypt would spit out the people of God and they would make their way to the Promised Land. God would be glorified through it all. He would reveal Himself as the Deliverer.

Thou shalt have no other gods. Pharaoh had more than he could count. Moses had one. Because they defied the living God, Egypt would endure a very high mortality rate. Among the firstborn, 100% would find their way into a coffin, a grave, a sepulcher, a cremation urn. Among the Egyptians, "there was not a house where someone was not dead" (Exodus 12:30). Death was indiscriminate. At midnight, the Lord struck down the firstborn in the land of Egypt. From the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who sat in the dungeon (Exodus 12:29). The Israelites, 100% of them, were protected by the Lamb's blood where they sheltered.

I have never seen what I see now. In the culture around us, there is as strong a response to the threat of death as there has ever been. Oh, I've seen the footage, the old newsreels of students practicing "duck and cover." In the early 1950's schools across the country were training students to dive under their desks and cover their heads. The **duck-and-cover drills** simulated what should be done in case of an atomic attack—and these drills channeled a growing panic over an escalating arms race. What we are living through now is remarkably larger. What we are living through now is duck and cover on steroids.

In California, for every one million people, thirteen have died of coronavirus. Look around; it is as strong a response to a minimal threat that I have ever seen. For a great many people, death has never been larger; never been larger in their eyes, larger in their minds, larger in their hearts – and it is all focused on one thing: Coronavirus, Wuhan Flu, Covid-19. It's almost as though before this pandemic that we didn't know what death was. Some smart aleck once wrote that studies have shown that the leading cause of death is life. 100%. For all of you who are alive, death is coming. Some think that the response to death has been overblown. In reality, it is not nearly strong enough. It is misguided, the protections that people are adopting cannot really save them, save them in any real sense. No hydroxychloroquine could save the firstborn of Egypt. No antiseptic wipes, no face mask, no amount of bleach can stave off death. Like a science fiction monster, if you hack off one head of death, two more grow in its place.

Sin feeds death. Your sin has served death a monstrous meal. Do you know what you have done? For purely selfish gain, you have allied yourself with death. Lust does this. Deception does this. Pride and greed and laziness and cowardice – we have feed death too much. Death shows no shame – it gladly bites the hand that feeds it. Whose side are you on? Life or death?

It is the living God who saves us from death. He does it in one way. If an Israelite family rejected Moses' proscription for Passover, if they had disregarded the protection which God put in place for them, if they blew off smearing their door posts and the lintel with the blood of a year-old lamb without blemish or defect, if they just turned on the tele or played backgammon or Mario Cart, what would've happened to them? As the coronavirus makes its way in our land, death of a certain variety, what has the government chosen to do? Close the churches, where the remedy for death of every variety is located. Irony of ironies. And Christians have gone along. Christ and His blood – are they essential or non-essential?

The Lord Christ is the Lamb of God whose blood marks our doors. He is the One who sacrificed Himself. The firstborn over all creation who allowed death to sweep into His divine person and take Him. He adopted no protection of any sort. He opened Himself up to death's grim assault. God did this, because we had to get out. Not out of Egypt – out of this world. Out of a land of slavery to sin, out of a broken creation where death is Pharaoh and the Promised Land is not in our reach. The Exodus is the story of your life, it is the story of Christianity, it is the story of death and resurrection. The Israelites, that night, while death swept through the land, after painting their door frames with the blood of the lamb, they were to be inside their homes, eating the lamb.

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus was keeping the Passover, Jesus was beginning to fulfill the Passover, to invest it with its eternal meaning, to infuse it with its eternal purpose, its eternal power. His church was gathered with Him in the Upper Room, at a sacramental table. Death was going to descend... on Him. And Jesus provided the remedy, the medicine of immortality, the bread of life, the bread of heaven, for His church. He is the protection you need. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27). And Jesus gave His church His body to eat and His blood to drink. Peace comes in that sacrament. Peace which Christ purchased by His death and resurrection. Peace, upon which the church has feasted for

millennia, in times of sickness and health, when we are richer and when we are poorer – peace is what Christ gives His bride, the church.

And you are watching this at home – through your computer, separated from this Holy House, one of the most sanctified places on the earth. There is something unnatural about our circumstance, something that makes the Christian heart uneasy. You cannot be at this altar, where Christ dispenses the holy food of heaven, the fruit of His sacrifice, the meal of eternity, a meal meant for you, meant for this night, meant for you and He to be united. I know that your mind is on Him, His love, His sacrifice, His Divine Service. Even more so, His mind is on you. What did He do in order to be united to you? He left His heaven and took up residence in the womb of a virgin. God Himself became a tiny baby that you might be united to Him. Vulnerable, He lived in the wide open, subject to every threat that barks at us – and He was content. God lived among us, enduring our faithlessness, our selfishness, our pettiness.

What did He do in order to be united to you? He lived thirty-three perfect years, and He suffered. Unjustly, He suffered. To ensure that you would ever be with Him, God died, crucified. The agony of the cross would not get in the way, the hatred of man would not get in the way, the schemes of Satan would not get in the way – He wants to be with you, and you with Him. He died to make it so. Not just for this life. By no means just for this life. He is bringing you home. Now, He is in His church – where the Word is preached and the sacraments are celebrated. He is with you, in your homes, having made your soul His tabernacle. You are genuinely protected. He is risen from the dead and His ongoing ministry has never been more robust.

The Israelites were delivered from Egypt. We are delivered from sin and death. Heaven is our home and the Lord Christ, the Lamb of God, is the Way.