

Sunday 6th September 2020
A Sermon by the Rev James W. Aitchison
Based on a Reading from the Lectionary

Opening Prayer

Lord God, among the countless things
that we cannot fully comprehend about you,
there are these:

that you love us so,
you bathe us with grace,
you are merciful toward us,
and forgive us our sins.

Almighty God,
whose ways are far beyond our understanding,
help us to trust your judgments
so that we may do your will
by loving you and one another.

We offer these prayers
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

A Reading from Holy Scripture:

Exodus 12:1-14 The Passover

12 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, ² 'This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. ³ Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household.

⁴ If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbour, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. ⁵ The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. ⁶ Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. ⁷ Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the door-frames of the houses where they eat the lambs. ⁸ That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. ⁹ Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire - with the head, legs and internal organs. ¹⁰ Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. ¹¹ This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover.

¹² 'On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. ¹³ The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

¹⁴ 'This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord - a lasting ordinance.

New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

Sermon

Today's sermon is taken from the Old Testament reading from Exodus chapter 12. It is about what, in English we call the Passover and what in Judaism is called Pesach, which can be translated as 'to passover' or 'to spare.'

By the time the stories in Exodus occur the Hebrew people had been slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years, (430 years according to Exodus 12:40) and God had in His wisdom waited until now to bring about their delivery and freedom.

He chose Moses, the brother of Aaron the High Priest, to be the messenger and agent of this deliverance and sent him to Pharaoh with the message to set the Hebrews free.

Pharaoh was going to need some persuasion; after all, the Hebrew people slaves, i.e. The Israelites, were his work force, where else was he going to get the unpaid labourers for his building projects?

God sends Moses with a message for Pharaoh,

"This is what the Lord says: let my people go, so that they may worship me."

You will notice that this was not a request but a command: a new experience for a Pharaoh who thought of himself as divine and was only used to giving commands; no one commanded Pharaoh, certainly not a weak god of a weak and subjugated people.

God not only commands Pharaoh to let His people go, he tells him that if he does not, there will be consequences for disobeying The Lord God.

The first of these consequences would be that the river Nile would turn to blood consequently the fish would die and the crops along the side of the Nile would die, and etc. (This was to be the first of ten plagues). This plague was a direct assault on the Egyptian god Hapi, who was believed to be the 'Lord of the Fish and Birds of the Marshes,' and 'Lord of the River Bringing Vegetation.' (Both are titles for the Egyptian god Hapi).

Some have argued that each of the ten plagues were a direct assault on Egyptian Gods, if so then this would be a visual lesson the Egyptians gods were helpless before The LORD God (of the Israelites).

At first Pharaoh ignored these signs or warnings but as each of the plagues became successively more harsh and harder to bear, he became a little more inclined to let the Israelites go, sometimes allowing them and then relenting on his decision.

The tenth plague however was the most severe and the one that affected the royal household more than any other. (Unlike the common people, Pharaoh and the Royal household had been shielded from the worst effects of the other plagues).

Having hardened his heart to the ninth plague, that is the plague of three days of total darkness over the land, Pharaoh tells Moses to get out of his sight and not to return, if he does he will have him killed. Moses replies, "Just as you say, I will never see your face again." then he leaves and Pharaoh must have thought that

the matter was now over and he had shown his power over the Israelites and their God: Egypt had endured the plagues and still had its slaves.

But The LORD God was going to make sure His people would be set free.

The tenth plague was about to come upon Egypt and it would be the hardest to bear. About midnight on an appointed day God would send an angel of death over Egypt and every Egyptian first-born male, including those of the precious cattle, would die. This was indeed a very sad event, and yet it was avoidable; all the plagues were avoidable, if only Pharaoh had humbled himself and obeyed the LORD God and let the Israelites go.

Moses is told to instruct the Israelites that before the Angel of death passes over the land they are to make preparations so that no harm would come to them.

Every Israelite family was to take a one-year-old male lamb, 'without blemish,' and to keep it until the fourteenth day of what is the first month of the Israelite calendar, the month of Nisan. On the 14th of this month at twilight, that time of day when it is neither fully day nor fully night, the in-between time; every Israelite household was to kill the lamb and to prepare it for cooking, some of its blood was to be sprinkled onto the two doorposts and lintel of the house where the (First Passover) meal was to be eaten.

That night God would 'Passover" Egypt and every first-born male who was not in a house which had been marked by the blood of the lamb, would die. The Egyptians new nothing of the protecting blood of he lamb and consequently every Egyptian family was affected.

Pharaoh lost his son and in his grief allowed the Israelites their freedom and the right to leave Egypt.

From this day on The Israelites were to observe the Passover every year, both as a reminder of their preservation and deliverance out of bondage, and as yet unknown to the Israelites as a type, or signal of that day when the Perfect Lamb of God would be sacrificed and His blood would be shed, to set all His people free. (Is it too fanciful a thought that two doorposts either side of a door and the lintel above equate to three points of a cross?).

The Scriptures point out that the Israelites were not saved because of anything they had done nor were they and allowed to enter the Promised Land as a reward for their own righteousness. (See Deuteronomy 7:7 and 9:5).

By observing the Passover every year, and every year since, the Jewish people are reminded that all blessings came to them through the shedding and sprinkling of the blood of a lamb. If we think that abhorrent, what do we remember every Remembrance Sunday? We remember how we have a free society secured by those who were willing to shed their blood.

The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:7 refers to Christ as 'Our Passover Lamb.' And John the Baptist, when he saw Jesus coming towards him said, "Look the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

Jesus was/is perfect in every way, sinless and therefore His sacrifice of Himself as the spotless Lamb of God was perfect. Whereas the sacrifices of the lambs had to take place every year, Jesus self sacrifice was complete, never needing to be repeated and can never be surpassed.

Jews celebrate Passover in the first month of Nisan, which corresponds approximately to March/April in the Gregorian Calendar, they remember and celebrate how God spared their ancestors, 'Passed Over them,' set them free from slavery and gave them a new beginning in a fertile land flowing with milk and honey. They celebrate God's favour and mercy upon His people of all generations.

For Christians, Good Friday and Easter can be considered as our Passover.

On Good Friday we remember and celebrate that Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, shed His blood, so that we might be freed from sin and its consequences of eternal separation from God, so that the spectre eternal death might Passover us

And because of His Resurrection we are set free from spiritual slavery and have been given the greatest of all privileges, the right to enter into that eternal Promised Land a land flowing with milk and honey where we are to be joint heirs with Christ. Halleluiah, and Halleluiah Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

All-knowing God,
you know our needs before we name them in prayer.
All-caring God, you care enough to hear our prayers anyway,
knowing that all we truly need is your love.
All-loving God, hear now these prayers
that name the needs of your people:

Your people need health . . .
*[mention situations—illness, surgery, addiction—where healing
is a particular need].*

Your people need peace . . .
*[mention situations—war, abuse, conflict—where peace
is a particular need].*

Your people need hope . . .
*[mention situations—job loss, divorce, prejudice, coming out of
lockdown—where hope is a particular need].*

Your people need blessing . . .
*[mention situations—marriage, birth, new beginnings—
where blessing is a particular need].*

Your whole creation needs your powerful presence.
All-powerful God,
the need is so great;
we rejoice that you are greater.
We offer these prayers in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Commemoration of the Faithful Departed

And now, Father, bring to our remembrance the unity of the church in heaven and on earth, fill us with the joy of the faithful departed, and keep us faithful to you all the days of our service here on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who taught us to pray, when He said, 'Our Father...'

The Lord's Prayer

OUR Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
For ever. Amen.

The Blessing

The Blessing of God Almighty, The Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit be upon you. Amen!

