

Good Friday 2019
April 19, 2019

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tonight we are gathered here to remember Jesus crucified.

Also happening this evening, Jewish families around the world are starting their Passover celebration, which started this afternoon with a lamb being slaughtered.

Have any of you ever shared in a Seder meal, the big Passover meal?

It's a meal full of symbolism that represents the Israelites escape from Egypt – it includes bitter herbs for the bitterness of slavery, eggs symbolizing grief, salt water which represents tears, a sweet paste that represents the mortar used for laying bricks, and vegetables that represent hope and renewal.

Sometimes it also includes a shank bone from a chicken, but it usually never includes any lamb.

Most people do not serve lamb at the Seder meal, partially because the temple no longer exists, but also because after the first Passover it became a tradition to only sacrifice one lamb for the entire community. One perfect lamb is killed for everyone.

In John's account of the crucifixion, Jesus was crucified at the same time as the lamb was being slaughtered for the Passover in the year 33.

In John's telling, we cannot separate the crucifixion from the slaughter of the Passover lamb.

As you may recall in Exodus, the Israelites were told to kill a lamb and to put the blood on the door posts so that the angel of death would pass over their homes. It was a marking that said, "These people belong to God."

The blood of the lamb protected the Israelites from death. The blood of the lamb saved them, and it also set them free. It freed them from slavery so that they could enter into God's Promised Land.

Jesus is crucified at the same time that the lamb is killed to remember the Passover.

In John's proclamation, Jesus' blood is the blood of the lamb – the blood of the Passover lamb. He is the one perfect lamb killed for all people.

It is his blood that protects us from death, and it is his blood that sets us free to enter God's promise of salvation.

Jesus' death saves us, and his blood brings us life.

In the Jewish sacrificial understanding, life is found in the blood. That is why only God was allowed to have the blood of the sacrifice. Humans were not allowed to consume it.

Through Jesus' blood, through his death, we are given life. Our sins are destroyed and thereby the ramification of our sin, death, is destroyed as well, and we are set free to enter God's kingdom. To live with God for all of eternity.

God uses death to destroy death, which is the eternal separation from God. Through Jesus' death we are eternally connected to God.

It's always weird to call the Friday we remember Jesus crucified as good, but for us it is very good. Jesus is the ultimate Passover lamb who saves us from the ramifications of our sins and gives us eternal life.

Jesus' blood protects us and marks us as God's very own. With that, God's wrath passes over us.

Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, our Passover lamb. And he goes willingly. It is his mission and nothing will stop him from completing it. That's how much you are loved.

If you were here on Ash Wednesday, you may remember me asking you, "how do we keep this grace, this free gift of salvation, from becoming cheap? How do we keep from taking it for granted?"

Well, being here tonight and remembering the entire story of Jesus' death in all of its gory detail is the perfect way to remember that Jesus' death was anything but cheap. It was the most elaborate gift God has ever given us. God gave us his life in order to give us life.

This is the ultimate act of love.

We are not gathered here tonight to wallow in guilt or shame. We are not here to mourn. We are here to witness – to witness God's amazing love for us and the lengths to which God will go for us.

We are here to remember that we are not worthy of that love based of anything we have done or not done, but that it is a free gift given to us because God already loves us.

As Paul says, “Christ died for us while we were yet sinners.” He did that so we would know God’s unconditional love for us.

God makes the first move and all we can do is respond to that love. We can’t earn it, it is given to us, but we can respond to it. And we respond to it by telling everyone we meet, through our words and actions, that God thinks they too are to die for, and he did. He died for everyone.

Thanks be to God. Amen.