

Two weeks ago we examined the sacrificial system of the Hebrew people during the Old Testament. We examined how the people relied on the sacrifice of animals, to atone for their sins.

The blood that was shed was so they might find forgiveness from God.

We discussed how once a year, on the day of atonement, the high priest would enter the holy of holies, where only the high priest was allowed, sacrifice a bull, and sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat of the ark.

This sacrifice served cleanse the consciences of the Israelites, for the sins they had committed the prior year.

But, they would have to do it all over again the next year. Our Old Testament reading from the book of Exodus this morning, tells us about another major feast day in the Jewish faith: the Passover.

Let's get a little historical background.

The people of Israel have been the slaves of the Egyptians for over 400 years, and God has chosen Moses to help liberate them from this oppression.

God has inflicted a series of plagues on the Egyptians, in order to break their will, and to free all the people of Israel from their chains.

The tenth and final plague to be unleashed, is the striking down of the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast.

The Lord gives Moses a plan to protect the people of Israel from the plague:

God instructs him to tell the people of Israel to take a male lamb of one year old, without blemish, and slaughter it.

Then they shall mark their doorposts with some of the blood of the sacrificial animal, so that the plague would "pass over" their home.

The end result would be freedom for the Hebrew people -- freedom from 400 years of oppression at the hands of pharaoh --

and a new beginning.

This is why passover is such a big deal.

Not only were lives spared, but,

it gave the people of Israel their identity as God's chosen people. The celebration of the passover meal that has followed ever since,

a commemoration commanded by God, has been in recognition of God's steadfast love and devotion to His people, and their freedom in Him.

Throughout the rest of the Old Testament,

Passover preeminently signifies God's rescue and forging together of His Chosen People, Israel.

Even though the passover sacrifice was similar to other ritual sacrifices,

it was different in a few ways.

We learned that only the high priest could offer the annual sacrifice for atonement of all the people's sins; however, the passover sacrifice was to be performed by everyone.

Not just the priests or members of one tribe,  
but all of Israel together.

Could you imagine if we had to do this today?

I must tell you,

our house and our firstborn would be toast,  
because there is no way Jen would allow me to kill a cute little lambie!

Well, she probably would, if God commanded it, but she wouldn't be very happy about it.

Luckily,

we do not have to sacrifice lambs anymore.

But why not?

A central idea of early Christianity was that the crucifixion itself was comparable to a sacrificial offering.

In fact,

the early church,  
read the passover story,

as a sort of "type."

A "type" is a prefiguring event or characteristic of Christ found in the Old Testament -- foreshadowing, if you will.

In considering the Old Testament,

the early Christians needed to decide what its role and purpose for them was,

given that Christian revelation and the New Covenant was considered to have replaced it.

One purpose of the Old Testament for Christians was to demonstrate that Christ's first coming had been prophesied and foreseen, and that his life, death and resurrection were a fulfillment of the Old Testament narrative.

Typology is also a theory of history,

seeing the whole story of the Jewish and Christian peoples as shaped by God,

with events within the story acting as symbols for later events.

A central idea of early Christianity was that the Christ's crucifixion was comparable to a sacrificial offering.

In fact,

they saw it as the ultimate sacrifice,  
after which none would be necessary.

Since the crucifixion took place at the time of the passover holiday,

the correlation,

or acceptance of the type was made.

Through his saving work,

Christ becomes our passover.

Through Christ,

we can experience liberation from sin and death.

In his letter to the Corinthians St. Paul says this:

“Christ our passover,  
was sacrificed for us.

Therefore let us keep the feast.”

This should sound familiar,  
although I am not yet able to say these words because I am only a deacon.  
These words can be found at the fraction during the canon of the mass.

Each week,  
when the priest breaks the host,  
he declares that we are embarking on the new passover feast.  
And that when we take and eat the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
we are reaping the same benefits as the Israelites did in the first passover:  
we are freed from our slavery.

Slavery to sin or death;  
slavery to trying to keep up with the Joneses.  
Slavery to thinking we need the nicest car,  
the perfect wardrobe,  
or even the so called perfect life.

I know there are some of you here today,  
that are struggling financially;  
Christ’s death on the cross tells you that if you trust in Him,  
and follow his principles,  
you don’t have to be a slave to money any longer.

Christ,  
our passover lamb,  
allows us to stop worrying about the broken relationships we might have;  
his blood that was shed can heal it.

Finally,  
Christ’s death on the cross means we are no longer held captive to the fear of death,  
because we will be raised at the command of Christ’s voice.

Maybe you are here this morning,  
and you have never experienced this freedom I am talking about.  
Maybe you feel like you’re trapped in one bad situation after another,

and that there is no way out.

Can I tell you? There is a way out.

Because Christ died for each and every one of us,

we can be liberated,

and like the people of Israel,

we can have new identities.

We no longer have to settle for the title drunk,

addict,

lazy,

loser,

home-wrecker,

or any other name that calls us what we might have been at one time.

Christ's death on the cross,

gives us each a new name:

loved one,

redeemed,

forgiven,

freed,

and on and on and on.

The benefits that we receive because of Christ's sacrifice,

far outweigh even those experienced by the Israelites at the first passover.

Whereas they were able to escape death for a while,

at the end of their lives that was it.

As well, sin was not conquered in the first passover, but it was in Christ's sacrifice and final passover.

An early Christian by the name of Melito,

puts it so clearly,

“Sin rejoiced in all of this,

working together with death,

making forays into human souls

and preparing the bodies of the dead as his food.

Sin set his sign on every one

and those on whom he etched his mark were doomed to death.

All flesh fell under sin,

and every body under death,  
and every soul was plucked from its dwelling of flesh,  
and that which was taken from the dust was reduced to dust,  
and the gift of God was locked away in Hades.”

Luckily our story doesn't end here...

Melito continues,

“He is the one led like a lamb and slaughtered like a sheep;  
he ransomed us from the worship of the world  
as from the land of Egypt,  
and he set us free from the slavery from the devil as from the hand of pharaoh,  
and sealed our souls with his own spirit,  
and the members of our body with his blood.

This is the one who clad death in shame and,  
as Moses did to pharaoh,  
made the devil grieve.

This is the one who struck down lawlessness and made injustice childless,  
as Moses did in Egypt.

This is the one who delivered us from slavery to freedom,  
from darkness into light,  
from death into life,  
from tyranny into an eternal kingdom,  
and made us a new priesthood,  
and a people everlasting for himself.”

Since Christ became the lamb that was slain,  
we can now overcome the grave,  
just as He has promised,  
and experience the freedom and identity that was always meant for us.

Amen.