

*Texts: Exodus 12:1-13; 13:1-8; Luke 22:14-20*

*Subject: The Passover; The Last Supper*

*Theme: What God Does*

*Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost; Oct. 4, 2020, Online; Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

This week, our family got to spend some time out in nature, staying in Brian Head and visiting Cedar Breaks National Monument in Utah. It's a great time to be there, and social distancing is automatic. For those unaware, we were staying at a ski resort that had no snow - the place was empty. So it was good for us to pack up the truck, and hit the road. In preparing for the trip, we planned to bring our meals with us, and knowing we'd be gone for a few days, we emptied the fridge and brought what we would eat. We ate breakfast in our little cabin, made sandwiches each day, and had a picnic whenever we found a place to sit and rest. We played outside, hiked an alpine trail to a little pond, and took in the view of the remains of an ancient sea that once existed just to the east of us. We stopped at the overlooks and opened our eyes to see this amazing scenery displayed all around us. And we held on to the littles tightly, so they didn't go over the edge. We'd learned about how it's the wind that forms the beauty of the canyons and rock formations, even more than water in that place. Powerful volcanic eruptions, and movement of the earth have formed the plateaus, and colorful scenery. When you're there, it's not difficult to imagine the world being created, and to think about how God is still moving, still making, still masterfully shaping us as well.

The trip was also a brief respite, a time to get away from the news cycle, the stress and anxiety, and pressure we all face. We need relief when we are in a mode of constant worries and the feeling of being on high alert all the time. Sometimes, we all

need to step back and remember that God is still God, and we are God's people, and that the God who saves and protects, and brings peace and justice is always with us. That's what God does.

It might seem like a strange time of year to be talking about the Passover. We normally hear this story during Holy Week, as we remember the Last Supper, and Jesus' sharing this meal with His disciples. But today, we're going to get to think about this pivotal passage in scripture a bit more. In the last few weeks, we have heard God's promises from the book of Genesis, where God is already a saving God for Sarah and Abraham, Noah and his family, and in fact for all of Egypt through the wise leadership of Joseph, who used his power to provide for his family, forgiving them for the wrong they had done to him.

We've skipped a bit of the story to bring us to today, so let me fill in a little bit. After Joseph, many years passed, and a new Pharaoh took power who didn't remember Joseph. By then the Hebrew community had grown, and Pharaoh was afraid they'd become more powerful in the land, so he made them slaves. Moses was born, and God called him to lead the people out of Egypt but Pharaoh wouldn't let them go. We read that God hardened Pharaoh's heart and sent nine plagues, turning the river to blood, frogs, gnats, flies, diseased livestock, skin disease, storms, swarming locusts, and darkness, but still the people were not allowed to leave.

After the history of oppression in Egypt, and all this suffering, nothing had changed. So the Lord prepared the final plague, the death of all the firstborn children in the land. This would be a new beginning, an event of such great importance that the calendar would be changed to reflect this moment in history. The Israelites would share

a meal, and spread the blood of the lamb on the doorposts as a sign of faith, that they would be protected. When the morning came, they would leave Egypt, as free people, ready follow the Lord, and to be as God called them to be.

God delivered them. That's what God does.

Our context is different in many ways from that of the Israelites in Egypt, yet the story rings some familiar notes. Plagues? we can relate. Our natural world is suffering, and the effects of industrialization and human carelessness on our climate have become real to most of us. We have run out of names for hurricanes this year. Fires continue to rage on the west coast. Our own area is in a record breaking dry season. We struggle with systems that oppress: from the costs of healthcare, to an imbalance in our justice system, and a political infrastructure that has found us more polarized than ever. Economic inequality is easy to see in our time, and so many who are able and looking for work are often unable to find positions that pay enough to make the rent. Since March, I've been asked more than a few times if we find ourselves in Biblical end-of-days.

I don't think so.

Maybe Moses and Aaron thought that too. We can't be sure. But they too, like God's people throughout history, witnessed world-changing shifts in their lives, as *God prepared people for liberation*, and led them into a new way of being, not necessarily into less difficulty, but into something different - the freedom to live by faith, to trust in God, and to bring about the abundant life God would have for them.

We are told they prepared the meal (seemingly without questioning what God was about to do). They gathered as families, in small groups, and shared what they had

with anyone who didn't have enough. They ate the bread without yeast - unleavened, with all the people themselves prepared and ready to go to where the Lord would direct them. They would use the blood to mark the doorways, as sign of faithfulness and of obedience. And then God commanded them to remember the day. The festival of Passover would be celebrated to remember everything the Lord had done, and the people would share the story with their children, and their descendants. So they would know the power of their God to bring about freedom and new life, to protect and provide.

As we face what seem like unprecedented hardships, isolation, disease, and a shifting culture, and we look to an unknown future, can we find this kind of faith? Do we trust that God can and will bring about a new future for us? Can we still remind one another what God has done for us? So much of our story is still being written. Our future is still in God's hands. There are signs of it all around. The relatively brief history of our nation is filled with chapters we struggle to fully understand, and events that we wish had not happened. There has been suffering we have experienced and suffering we have caused. So we live and try to repair what relationships we can. We try to make the next wise and faithful decision. We sacrifice *for one another*, instead of sacrificing each other. We hold onto each other, and are reminded that we are one humanity, one nation, one people created for a reason.

Jesus sat with his friends and shared this meal, re-remembering what God had done, and preparing for the new thing God was doing. God in Christ was still preparing us for liberation, from our painful past, from the violence of the world, from our short-sighted ways, our desires and expectations, and the sin that clings to us. In going to the cross, Jesus became the new way for us, and called us to remember, to eat the bread

which is His body. To drink the blood that is the stuff of life. Jesus makes us into a people not divided by race or ethnicity, nation or statehood, but one in Him for eternity. Jesus feeds us and frees us every day to be a new community of believers.

We may be far apart, and faith may be a struggle at times. I have often said how important it is to gather and be faithful for one another when we need that. It might even be hard to pray in these difficult days. But God is still good. The pain and division that plagues us will not last forever. The God who made the rocks and mountains, the seas and all of life has promised us all a new kingdom, promised us peace and mercy, and to deliver us from bondage to sin and death. That is *what God does*.

This story of Moses and the Passover centers around the lived experience of a suffering people, struggling against plagues, oppression, and economic inequality. What does God want from us in this time? Could it be that we are to remember the story, to trust in the God who always delivers, to embrace faith in this One who keeps promises, and together look forward to the day when liberation is a true and present reality for all of us?

Our world is hurting, and we hurt too. Don't forget: God prepares, promises, and provides for us. God is doing it now. The wind - that Holy Spirit is bringing change, just like that winds form the canyons and the mountains, and making us new in the process. That's what God does. Amen.