

Maundy Thursday, Old Testament, Year C

READY TO GO

Exodus 12:1-4 [5-10] 11-14

Maundy Thursday

Analysis by Chris Repp

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ²This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ⁴If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it.

[⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight.⁷They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw

or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. ¹⁰You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn.]

¹¹This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord. ¹²For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. ¹⁴This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

DIAGNOSIS: Plagued

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Forgetful and in Captivity

A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He did not remember the story of how Joseph saved Egypt from famine by storing up food. He did not remember that these immigrants had been a blessing to his people. Had the Israelites also forgotten that their presence in Egypt had been a blessing to them, saving them from famine in the Promised Land? Had they forgotten, too,

that the evil their ancestors intended to do had been turned into good by God (Genesis 50:20)? Had they also forgotten about God and the promise made to Abraham? When Moses tried to remind them of that promise (Exodus 6:6-9) they would not listen. They were resigned to their captivity.

And what about us? Do we also forget God's promise to us when we are overwhelmed by the harsh realities of our lives? Do we also allow ourselves to become trapped by our circumstances, unwilling to listen to any alternative, resigned to moan under our burdens because we fear that things could only get worse?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Trusting Other Gods

Naturally the Egyptians trusted their own gods, who made their land prosperous and gave them victory over their enemies. Ancient gods were local gods. They took care of their territories and the people in them, and they expected to be worshiped. As now long-time residents of Egypt, Israel likely gave the Egyptian gods their due. "When in Egypt...." Even if they had remembered the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they probably would not have expected that there was any help to be had from that quarter outside of the Promised Land.

And what about us? Does the God we worship on Sunday morning have anything to do with the territory of Monday-Saturday, any power or influence there? Do we also turn to the local gods of common sense, power politics, and market-based economies,

convinced that the mercy, love, and forgiveness of our Sunday-morning God holds no sway in the “real world”?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Struck Down and Destroyed

Well, things are about to get “real,” as the saying goes. Allegiances are about to be tested, and miscalculations will be coming home to roost. The gods of the Egyptians will find themselves judged by the God for whom every land is local, the one who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth. Those who do not trust this God, who have turned to other gods, will find themselves struck down and destroyed.

And what about us? Is our allegiance to the above-mentioned local gods of the modern world also imperiling our existence? Do those gods not face the same judgment as the gods of Egypt, and we the same plague that afflicted the Egyptians?

PROGNOSIS: Passed Over

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Saved by a Lamb

Death came to the Egyptians’ first-born. Death came also to the lambs, whose blood marked the doors of the Israelites. In spite of their forgetful resignation to their slavery and their failure to trust God’s promise to them through their ancestors, God has mercy on the children of Israel. By the blood of the lambs they are saved.

God also has mercy on us. We too are provided a Passover Lamb, God's own firstborn, Jesus the Christ, who is sacrificed to save us, in spite of our infidelity, even while we are still deaf to God's promises and opposed to God's will. This Lamb is God in the flesh, whose death reconciles us to God and whose resurrection destroys the power of sin, death, and evil.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Trusting the Lord

The Passover engenders trust in the people of Israel. After witnessing the Passover, what can the Israelites do but leave behind their slavery, and hear God's promise with different ears. Maybe the Lord will make of them a great nation after all. Maybe they don't have to be slaves. Maybe they have a future, one with generations of descendants who will look back on this day with thanksgiving.

In a similar way, Jesus' death and resurrection engender trust in us – trust in God's promises of genuine, abundant, and everlasting life. We do not have to live in bondage to sin. We too can listen to God with new ears. We too have a future.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Remembering and Free

Now trusting in God's promises, the Israelites leave their captivity in Egypt, passing through the sea to freedom. They celebrate their freedom, remembering God's mercy, and following

God to the Promised Land.

Freed by Christ, we too pass through the water in Holy Baptism into the Promised Life in Christ, empowered to live freely, loving the world God loves, proclaiming God's reconciling love in word and deed, daily remembering God's grace in our lives and continually serving all in need with thanksgiving and joy.