

Sermon Text for March 29, 2018

by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Genesis 22:9-14, Mark 14:22-25
“Jesus, the sacrificial lamb”

As I was preparing for this sermon this week, I realized that as a people and as a culture we don't really have traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation. Think about it. Some of us have family gatherings and we tell the same stories and we play some of the same games. But are there ritualistic events that take place in these gatherings where every year people say the same words and enact an event that has taken place in the past so that we would not forget from where we come and to whom we belong? If we have a turkey on the table, then it probably is Thanksgiving. But that is not a ritual.

We have very strong allegiances to our sports teams so if I say fly eagle fly the rest of you could probably fill in the words with the tune. We are very passionate in this country about our sports and so we have certain colors and symbols and even songs and slogans that go along with our sports teams and we hold on to them, sometimes at the exclusion of other people. But that is not a ritual that will be passed down from generation to generation, it is not something that over the centuries your ancestors will remember.

We have religious events that as Christians we follow. If we say Christ is Risen, you know to say: He is Risen Indeed. There are Christmas carols that we sing and that we know. We do have some rituals within our Christian services that have lasted over the centuries and over the millennia, but what about at home? What do we do at home to pass down from generation to generation our faith, or our stories of how God has been active and involved? We do that at church, but what do we do at home? As we gather this evening we remember Jesus and his disciples and this service of Maundy Thursday is one of those rituals and one of those events that we are able to pass down from generation to generation.

The Passover meal is a meal that is very planned and has a certain rhythm and certain script that has been used for thousands of years. Yes, thousands. Jewish families in their own homes, not at church or at the temple, but in their own homes have celebrated the Passover meal in the same way, or nearly the same way, for thousands of years. As Christians we don't have that tradition so it makes is somewhat difficult to understand what exactly was taking place in that upper room when Jesus and his disciples were gathered together. They didn't get together just for a thanksgiving dinner where people are happy and there is a celebration, not it was a ritualistic meal that had its own script which Jesus and his disciples followed, until Jesus didn't follow it at all.

There are symbols and meanings throughout the meal that are followed. In the meal you would have to prepare ahead of time elements that would be used, which was why it was so important that Jesus' disciples go ahead and prepare that upper room for him, which they did. They would have bread, unleavened bread which would be a symbol of misery for their hurried escape out of Egypt, they would eat bitter herbs which would correspond to their time of slavery, they would eat fruit puree to signify the clay and the forced labor, they would have lamb which would signify the passing over of the angel over the people of Israel which lead to their

salvation. Interspersed throughout that meal would be wine which would be shared four times to signify the redemption of the Israelites from the Egyptian captivity.

This meal and these symbols have been in place for generations in the home not something that we as Christians have in our homes. Some of us may have advent candles and that would come the closest to a sustained traditional liturgy that we follow in the home that has been passed down through the ages. So when we read starting in vs.22 that he takes a loaf of bread while they are yet eating, so in the middle of the meal, and blesses it and breaks it and gives it to them. That is not unusual in the middle of a Passover meal. That would happen. What we have before us is Jesus with his family, his most intimate family, his disciples in the midst of a Passover meal, until things change.

We need to remember that present at this meal in Mark and in all of the other Gospel writers are not just the good disciples, but all twelve of the disciples including Judas. All things have been prepared and they are in the midst of their meal. Jesus takes the bread and distributes it to the disciples and at this point he is supposed to speak about the way in which the early Israelites had to hurriedly make unleavened bread over a fire as they were preparing to leave Egypt. But instead we read him say: "This is my body." That was not part of the script. That was not something any of the generations before him had said. Maybe he just had a little too much wine to drink and was forgetting what he was supposed to say.

Everyone would drink wine 4 times throughout this Passover meal and one of those times came up in vs.23 where he takes the cup, gives thanks or blesses it, gives it to those gathered, and they all drank from it. So verse 23 tracks what we would expect. There is nothing unusual, this is exactly what would happen in a Passover meal, until he Jesus begins speaking in vs. 24. This is my blood of the "new" covenant. Most of the most reliable manuscripts have the word "new" before covenant here. That makes sense because it does fulfill what Jeremiah spoke about in Jeremiah 31:31 where we read that God will make a new covenant with his people. Jesus says this is my blood, when over the centuries the blood that was assumed to be present was found in Exodus when the blood of the lamb was put on the doorposts which would save the Israelites. There was also redemption in the blood of the lamb that was sacrificed for the sake of the people and their sins in the old testament.

Our first Scripture reading we find Isaac who is willingly sacrificed by Abraham but God stops him because: "Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." We were told that Jesus is the lamb of God by John the Baptist when he sees him walking before his baptism. He is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. When Jesus personalizes the Passover meal and turn the bread into his body and the wine into his blood he presents before the disciples the fulfilment of Scripture that he is the lamb of God, the one sacrificed for their behalf so that they could be clean of their sins and inherit eternal life.

This is why we gather this evening, because the lamb of God was sacrificed on our behalf. Every single communion in which we take part is a community event. In vs.24 Jesus says that his blood is poured out for many, not just for one of us. Often we see communion as an individualistic come to Jesus moment when we get lost in our own relationship with our Savior. I want you to see communion differently. I want to see you as part of the group of disciples that

gathered that evening, all of who would turn their back on Jesus, but they were all called to be together.

You are not coming to this table by yourself this evening. Before communion, every single time, I say these are the gifts of God for the people of God, for the people of God. Look around the table when you gather and know that you are with family. Know that you are with people who are trying to follow Jesus as His disciples.

Finally, the last words that Jesus says in these verses are words of anticipation. The lamb of God will be with us again in His kingdom. The Lord's supper is not a memorial that we look back on and nostalgically hope to do better. The Supper in which we participate is a looking forward to that kingdom that is promised to us through our Savior. His death is the vicarious death of the suffering servant which atones for the sins of many, the people of the world, which ushers in the beginning of the final salvation and which effects the new covenant with God.

Rejoice, the lamb has been slain and has given us eternal life. Amen.