

## **THE MAJOR COVENANTAL SHIFT**

Hear the Word of God for this Maundy Thursday, as God declares:

*And the blood will be for all of you (a) Sign upon the houses in which you are there; and when I see the Blood, I will pass-over all of you, and there will be no plague in you all to cause to destroy (all of you) in My causing to smite (in) land of Egypt.<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

Tonight, in this congregation, we have been celebrating the major covenantal shift that God set in place for the benefit of His people in Christ Jesus. From the first Thursday of Jesus' washing His disciples clean and giving His New Commandment, throughout the Christian centuries, the faithful have gathered on the day we call Maundy Thursday. The Holy Spirit has called them together to recall, and enact, Jesus' servant-leadership displayed as He established God's New Covenant. We are, again this year, given this as a day of joy-filled expectation. God has again led us to the first day of the Great Triduum of Christ's Passion which sealed His New Covenant in His blood for sinners like you and me.

As was God's practice, He planned, wrote, and unilaterally put that Covenant into effect. He did not request any human help in setting it up. He did not, and has not, actually given His permission for any created being to amend, interpret or inform His New Covenant. He ensured that everything we need to know about His Covenant, and His Covenantal meal, has been clearly revealed through the God-breathed Scriptures.

The reality that many have tried to explain away His Words, given in His New Commandment, in no way reflects God's divinely revealed intent in His Covenant. The eternal truth is that God displays His grace, mercy and sacrificial love for sinners in granting them Jesus' True Body and Blood in, with, and under simple earthly elements.

God's one-way New Covenant of Forgiveness, foreshadowed in His one-way Old Covenant of Grace, the major covenantal shift, is central to this evening's Divine Service. That which has been, from tonight's Invocation of the Divine Name over you, celebrated

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 12:13

as a Feast of Forgiveness for Sinners, is God's New Creation in Christ.

It certainly had Old Covenant foreshadowings – as our Old Testament reading placed into our ears. There was an Israelite order of service (seder) to the Old Covenant Passover rites and meals. You may find them recorded in Holy Scripture. As Christ is the Last Passover, they have had no meaning or use for forgiveness, salvation, justification or sanctification since Christ Jesus established His New Covenant meal.

This is a fact: The Sacrament of the Altar did not replace a New Covenant-era Jewish seder meal. That which is now known as the Jewish seder was not codified until the mid-4th through beginning of the 6th century A.D. It appears that government persecution, by the then Christian Roman Empire, served to drive the seder practice into the text of the Babylonian Talmud, *Bavli Pesachim*, chapters 5 and 10. (Thank you for a pastoral book allowance that provides for the purchase of source documents. Such help keep us from heading into non-biblical practices. The Twelve long-ago would not have recognized a Jewish seder meal, let alone a Christianized seder). Back to our text for the evening, where God continues to declare the basis for that which was completed in Jesus:

*And the blood will be for all of you (a) Sign upon the houses in which you are there; and when I see the Blood, I will pass-over all of you, and there will be no plague in you all to cause to destroy (all of you) in My causing to smite (in) land of Egypt.<sup>2</sup>*

It has been several months since our Sunday Adult Bible Study reviewed the Exodus. Those of you who attended may remember that each of the 10 plagues God enacted resulted in the further hardening of Pharaoh's heart. You will recall that God did so to drive the Israelites from Egypt. You might even be able to envision the color printouts of the Egyptian gods that each plague attacked. The devastation in ancient Egypt displayed the One True God's power over its gods, priests, leaders and king.

As He gave the Passover rite to the people He was about to free, God said to Moses and Aaron that the blood of the slain lamb or goat per household would be a sign. The wording is clear, it is a sign – for them! It was to be lamb's blood painted *upon two of the*

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<sup>2</sup> Exodus 12:13

*doorposts and upon the lintel, upon the houses in which they eat them in them.*<sup>3</sup>

They whose sins were to be passed over were given a sign – in blood. This was to be done to remind them of God’s grace, mercy and salvation for them. After all, God already knew who each of His chosen people were. Think of the image that would come forth from those blood-painted doorposts and lintels....

You dear ones, have been given the same sign. Each Divine Service the rubrics (red letter instructions) in the hymnal indicate that you are free to use it to remember God’s grace, mercy, and salvation for you. When this sign is made + you are free to remember that the Lord continues His service of passing over His people’s sins.

The Sign God gave, as He prepared His people Israel to receive His Old Covenant meal, foreshadows the Sign God gave, He prepared His people to receive His New Covenant meal. It is the Sign of the Lamb, the final Lamb of sacrifice. It is the Sign of Him Who freely shed His blood to rescue you from slavery to sin, and all its eternal consequences. The New Covenant sign is given for all – for Lutherans, Anglicans, Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, Mennonites, for all who would be called, Christian – whether the followers of the teachings of those Church bodies recognize the import of the Sign or not.

In the New Covenant, as in the Old Covenant, the Sign is given with meals. They were given to be meals consumed by the faithful in the Faith, in the Presence of the Lord. The Lord’s Old meal was to be eaten with trust in the Lord’s deliverance. It was to be consumed in haste, with diners dressed for flight (for even when it was first given, it was passing away). The Old Covenant meal was for those who were about to leave quickly – even in its annual reenactments in the Promised Land. The faithful partakers were to stand and partake of the roasted Lamb (leaving none until morning – even burning the things left over), the bitter herbs, and the unleavened bread. It was a communal meal – from house to house, even with neighboring houses joined.

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<sup>3</sup> Exodus 12:7

The Lord's New meal, as you regularly experience, is to be eaten with trust in the Lord's deliverance – faith in the words, “given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins.” It is given to be consumed in the Faith by diners reclining in the Presence of the Lord, those who know and believe that He is serving them. It is for those with whom the Lord abides – in His Word. For those who do not, they will receive His Presence, to their own judgement.

On the other hand, the right hand, the hand of God's blessing grants to faithful meal-receivers the call to partake in a united confession of His Real Presence and full agreement in His Word. This is the New Covenant communal meal in which those who hold to the Lord's doctrines participate in the fruits of the faithfulness of Jesus, the Lamb of God.

The table meal in Jesus' table fellowship is for those who continue to follow, as one Body, His later command, His “Mandatum.” That He gave after He shed His blood for them. Jesus says that the Eleven and those who follow them into the Office He established are to be found continually making disciples (followers) of Him from all nations, *“teaching them to guard all things whatsoever I have commanded to you all.”*<sup>4</sup>

That is the service to which God's people continue to be called. The teaching of Jesus' disciples to hold fast to everything He commanded flowed from that which He said to you tonight. That is, He declared that the teaching servant-leadership role He displayed on the night in which He was betrayed is to be an example for those who follow Him.

Before that, His teaching about His caring for His people through His people had been reinforced for almost 1,500 years. That He gave through the example of a community called to unity. They were to be united in trust in His Word, by following His commands, as He passed over the sins of His people. This He declared to them through the Word He gave to Moses and Aaron, which still declares:

*You speak to the congregation of Israel to say: “In the tenth day in this month,*

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 28:20a

*they shall take for them, (a) man for his father's house, (a) male lamb per house; and if the house(hold) is too small to be with (a) lamb, then he shall take with his nearest neighbor to his house according to (the) number of souls, for what each man can eat you shall number for (the) lamb."*<sup>5</sup>

First, God commanded to them an annual feast at a set time in which they would partake of His covenantal meal. Second, He set up that meal to have a horizontal dimension – that it would be eaten with their fellow believers. Third, He gave the command that even their close neighbors in the community would be joined at this family meal.

The text is very specific: those who were called to His covenantal meal were to invite those who lived closest to them until they had enough people near to them that they might completely consume the covenant meal. He was providing for those who were insufficient in themselves by joining them together. They, like we who share in the Lord's New Covenant meal, were to have communion table fellowship not just with God but with all who held common confession and were invited to the table.

In our New Covenant times, this indicates that all who recline at God's family tables are to share a common bond. We are called by God to a common confession. We are to share a common Lamb. We are to be joined in heart, mind and the Spirit of God as we participate in receiving the gift of God's blood-bought forgiveness. Such are God's revealed "Maunds," His commandments concerning His covenantal meal.

From that, it follows that we are free to continue to serve others by offering from the gifts we have received, our maunds. (You can read the teaching about that word in your bulletin insert). Perhaps you have never considered the baskets by the door to the Church to be closely connected to Maundy-Thursday. Our New Covenant response to God's teaching this day may be discovered in our baskets, our maunds, which are actually used for the distribution of food and money for the poor. That is enough for the teaching for this New Covenant day....

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

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<sup>5</sup> Exodus 12:3-4

Lent VI, Maundy-Thursday (One-year series)

Exodus 12:1-14; I Corinthians 11:23-32; John 13:1-15

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***Soli Deo Gloria***