

Christ Our Passover

1 Corinthians 5:7-8; Exodus 12:1-8

April 21, 2024 The Fourth Sunday of Easter

First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction-Passover starts this Tuesday

Jesus died on Passover, and in the structure of how these holidays are determined sometimes they take place at the same time, and this year one starts long after the other is finished. Easter is behind us but Passover starts this Tuesday. Let's take a look at some of the symbolism of this holy season still honored by Jewish people around the world.

- Set the Stage

Exodus-making sure that they don't take Egypt with them when they left

We are all familiar with the episode of the Exodus in chapter twelve of the book of the same name. Moses, once of prince of the Empire of Egypt himself, is now God's man of deliverance for the Israelis after over four centuries of slavery. Slavery, by the way, that was predicted by God to Abram centuries before in Genesis 15:13. After a series of confrontations and miracles, God tells Moses to leave Pharaoh alone and prepare to leave. He instructs the people to sacrifice and lamb, and to cover the door frame of their homes with the blood of the lamb. What God says next is chilling. In verse 23 we find: "For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you." Everyone and everything else lost their firstborn son. This national calamity for Egypt was the opportunity for deliverance for Israel, and they left Egypt forever and honor the God of deliverance every year.

1 Corinthians-the leaven is all about purity of life

It may have been around Passover when the Apostle Paul wrote the church in Corinth and mentioned that Christ was our Passover Lamb, the final one. But look at the context. Paul made comment about the removal of leaven-yeast that could decay and corrupt over time, as a symbol of the command of purity of life from the Lord. He wrote this right in the middle of a scandal in the church. Corinth, as a city, had a reputation for decadence but here, in the church, was someone having an affair with his step-mother. Even the corrupt Corinthians were shocked. Paul demanded that we put a stop to this because, like yeast, our behavior affects others and the behavior of others affects and influences us. People had become complacent, and that is a dangerous state.

- Main Point-prayerful self-examination needed for refreshment and purity of life

There's a verse in the Old Testament about becoming complacent. It's Zephaniah 1:12 "And it shall come to pass at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and punish the men who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart 'the Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil.'" The idea that God has never acted, and He won't act any time soon is dangerous. Especially since complacency comes from a lukewarm heart. People don't try to be lukewarm or complacent, they just get tired and we start to become indifferent to what is going on in ourselves and in others near

us. Just as the people in Exodus were to remove the leaven, anything that corrupts, we are to take the time periodically to prayerfully reflect on our lives and ask ourselves about what influences us? How do we influence others? Is there a purity about our lives that stands in contrast with the world, and if not, why not?

- Application-schedule times to be alone and pray (Peter on Exodus)

The application to this is to make sure that you take time to pray and examine yourself, your thoughts, words, actions and habits. Plan this ahead of time otherwise the busy nature of life will always keep you too busy. There's a story about a business executive giving a presentation to the company board. He placed some large rocks into a glass jar, then some smaller rocks, then some pebbles. He then asked if the people thought there was room for more. They were skeptical until the executive took out a bag of sand and managed to put all of it into the jar. He then asked if there was room for anything else. They all said, "no." That's when he added about a quart of water. Now it was full. He asked the board to come up with the moral of the story, so to speak. One suggested that the wise do not easily give up, another said that we can fit so much more into our schedule and be more productive if we only try. The executive disagreed. He said that point to the demonstration was that if the large jar was your life, then you need to place the big rocks in first, or you will never get them in. Reflecting on your life in prayer is a big rock, it is our way of being prepared for our exodus, which, according to Peter, is when we leave to meet the Lord (2 Peter 1:15).

- Conclusion

There's much to be said about the relationship between Christ and the Passover, but for now let it suffice that the symbolism of removing the yeast from the home has a very powerful counterpart in our spiritual lives. Just as the home is to be free of the corrupting influence of bad yeast, so our lives are to be free of corruption in thought, word and deed. This requires periodic self-examination, and a time to prayerfully reflect. It is the way to keep ourselves ready for whatever God has next for us, and to refresh us and keep us away from bad influences.

- The Good Shepherd

Theme

Jesus is the good shepherd.

Object

Scripture

John 10:11

Do you know the story of the "Three Little Pigs?" Raise your hand if you do. (Pause.) I just love that story. I'm going to retell it, and when I do, I need the boys to "oink" when I say "pig," and the girls to "howl" when I say "wolf." Everyone should "baaa" like sheep when I mention sheep. Let me hear you practice your noises. (Pause while kids practice). Is everybody ready?

The story begins with the mother pig (Pause for "oink") sending her three little ones out into the world to make their own fortunes. The first little pig (Pause for "oink") built himself a house of straw, the second little pig (Pause for "oink") built a house of sticks, and the third little pig (Pause for "oink") built a house of bricks.

The big, bad wolf (Pause for "howl") went to the first little pig's (Pause for "oink") house and knocked on the door. "Little pig (Pause for "oink"), little pig (Pause for "oink"), let me in," he said.

The little pig (Pause for "oink") answered, "Not by the hair on my chinny chin chin."

"Then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in," replied the wolf (Pause for "howl").

The first little pig's (Pause for "oink") house of straw was not very strong, so the wolf (Pause for "howl") easily blew it down, and the little pig (Pause for "oink") ran to safety at the second little pig's (Pause for "oink") house.

The wolf (Pause for "howl") went to the second little pig's (Pause for "oink") house and knocked on the door. "Little pig (Pause for "oink"), little pig (Pause for "oink"), let me in."

The little pig (Pause for "oink") answered, "Not by the hair on my chinny chin chin."

"Then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in," replied the wolf (Pause for "howl").

The second little pig's (Pause for "oink") house of sticks was not very strong, so the wolf (Pause for "howl") blew it down, and the two little pigs (Pause for "oink") ran to their brother's house.

The wolf (Pause for "howl") went to the third little pig's (Pause for "oink") house and knocked on the door. "Little pig (Pause for "oink") , little pig (Pause for "oink"), let me in."

The little pig (Pause for "oink") answered, "Not by the hair on my chinny chin chin."

"Then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in," replied the wolf (Pause for "howl").

No matter how hard he tried, the wolf (Pause for "howl") could not blow the brick house down! The wolf (Pause for "howl") decided to go down the chimney, but the three little pigs (Pause for "oink") had a pot of boiling water. "Yeow!" cried the wolf (Pause for "howl").

Having outsmarted the big, bad wolf (Pause for "howl"), the three little pigs (Pause for "oink") begin to sing:

"Who's afraid of the big bad wolf (Pause for "howl")?"

Big bad wolf (Pause for "howl"), big bad wolf (Pause for "howl")?

Who's afraid of the big bad wolf (Pause for "howl")?

Tra la la la la."

There have been many stories written about a big, bad wolf (Pause for "howl"). You have probably heard about "Little Red Riding Hood," "Peter and the Wolf (Pause for "howl")," and "The Boy Who Cried Wolf (Pause for "howl")," but did you know that Jesus once told a story about a big, bad wolf (Pause for "howl")? In the story that Jesus told, the good shepherd is Him, and the sheep (Pause for "baaa") are us. The wolf (Pause for "howl") in Jesus' story is God's enemy.

Here's what Jesus said in the Bible:

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for His sheep (Pause for "baaa"). A hired hand will run away when he sees a wolf (Pause for "howl") coming, because the sheep (Pause for "baaa") don't belong to him, and he doesn't really care about them. When the hired hand runs away, the wolf (Pause for "howl") will attack and scatter the sheep (Pause for "baaa")."

"I am the good shepherd. I know My sheep (Pause for "baaa") and My sheep (Pause for "baaa") know Me—just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father. I will lay down My life for My sheep (Pause for "baaa")."

Jesus is the good shepherd, and we are His sheep (Pause for "baaa"). He knows us and He loves us. He will protect us when God's enemy or anyone tries to hurt us. When we trust Jesus, we can say, "Who's afraid of the big, bad wolf (Pause for "howl")?"

God, thank You for sending Your Son to be our good shepherd. He gave His life for us. Help us to follow Him and trust Him to protect us from the evil one. In Jesus' name, amen.