

Exodus 12:1-14

¹ The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ² “This month will be the first month; it will be the first month of the year for you. ³ Tell the whole Israelite community: On the tenth day of this month they must take a lamb for each household, a lamb per house. ⁴ If a household is too small for a lamb, it should share one with a neighbor nearby. You should divide the lamb in proportion to the number of people who will be eating it. ⁵ Your lamb should be a flawless year-old male. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶ You should keep close watch over it until the fourteenth day of this month. At twilight on that day, the whole assembled Israelite community should slaughter their lambs. ⁷ They should take some of the blood and smear it on the two doorposts and on the beam over the door of the houses in which they are eating. ⁸ That same night they should eat the meat roasted over the fire. They should eat it along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹ Don’t eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over fire with its head, legs, and internal organs. ¹⁰ Don’t let any of it remain until morning and burn any of it left over in the morning. ¹¹ This is how you should eat it. You should be dressed, with your sandals on your feet and your walking stick in your hand. You should eat the meal in a hurry. It is the Passover of the Lord. ¹² I’ll pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I’ll strike down every oldest child in the land of Egypt, both humans and animals. I’ll impose judgments on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. ¹³ The blood will be your sign on the houses where you live. Whenever I see the blood, I’ll pass over you. No plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. ¹⁴ “This day will be a day of remembering for you. You will observe it as a festival to the Lord. You will observe it in every generation as a regulation for all time.

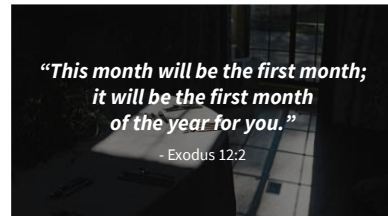
1st Corinthians 11:23-26

²³ I received a tradition from the Lord, which I also handed on to you: on the night on which he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread. ²⁴ After giving thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this to remember me.” ²⁵ He did the same thing with the cup, after they had eaten, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Every time you drink it, do this to remember me.” ²⁶ Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you broadcast the death of the Lord until he comes.

In our passage from Exodus 12, God begins with these instructions for Moses and for Israel: *“This month will be the first month; it will be the first month of the year for you.”* There is a new beginning

here. And it will be a new beginning year after year after year. Every year, at this time, Israel will remember what the Lord has done and it will be a beginning, a restart each year into a new way of living and being in the world. For the Israelites, this night was the inbreaking of a new reality. They would no longer be slaves in Egypt. So, for the people of God, this night was the opportunity to rethink, to reorient, to begin a whole new life.

Many of us experience this same idea and thought process leading up to January 1 as we reflect and consider the new year. We look back in order to move forward in a better, healthier, more whole way. Tonight we are invited to do the same. In the ritual hand washing, in the practice of Holy Communion, we pause each time to reflect, to rethink, to reorient our hearts and lives with the heart and life of Jesus. We then will receive the oil of blessing as a seal. As we prepare to do so on this night, let us begin with a word or prayer...



Gracious God, as Jesus ate with his friends, we come to experience the grace of your table. As Jesus celebrated your Passover, we come to rejoice that you deliver us from sin and death. As Jesus washed the feet of his friends, we come to be washed in your love. Jesus commanded us to love one another. Fill us with the bread of your love so that we may humbly and lovingly serve the world in the name of Christ. It is with this hope that I ask you, O God, to bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.

The night that Jesus gathered with his disciples to celebrate what we call “The Last Supper” was deeply rooted in the Jewish Passover tradition. The table has been set with all of the usual foods and with the usual glasses of wine required for this highly ritualized meal. To understand these connections, we turn to Exodus 12, the scene of the first Passover. As we do so, we remember that nine plagues have preceded this last plague. Pharaoh has “freed” the Israelites again and again, only to change his mind as God hardened his heart. So, this is not the story of a casual dinner party. There is haste and urgency in these words.

In verses 3-11 God instructs Israel in how to prepare and eat this meal. They are to take a flawless year-old male sheep into their home. They are to live with the lamb for four days and then are to slaughter it at twilight. The blood of the lamb is to be smeared on the doorposts and above the door of their homes. The Israelites are to roast the lamb and to eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Nothing is to remain of the lamb. Whatever is uneaten is to be burned in the fire. In verse 11 we see *how* they are to eat this meal: dressed, sandals on, walking stick in hand. They are to eat the meal in a hurry.



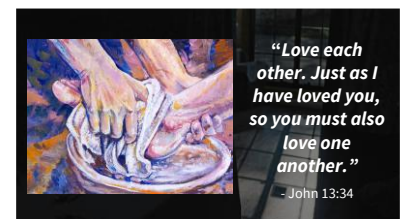
The tenth plague and the Passover happen in verses 12 and 13. God will pass through the land of Egypt, striking down many of the first-born males, both human and animal. In verse 13 we read, *“The blood will be your sign on the houses where you live. Whenever I see the blood, I’ll pass over you. No plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.”* Israel will be spared from the plague of death. The blood of the lamb will protect the Israelites. With death all around them, surrounding them, the people of God will be saved. Because God protected them in this extraordinary way, this night will be remembered. The Israelites *“will observe it in every generation as a regulation for all time.”* From this night until forever, the Passover will be remembered, celebrated, honored. This is what Jesus did when he gathered with his disciples in the upper room.



In the gospels, we get glimpses into this night – Jesus’ last night with his disciples. Both Matthew and Mark lean into the betrayals of Jesus – Judas’ before and Peter’s after the meal together. The words of institution are echoed by Paul in 1st Corinthians 11. Luke’s account references Judas’ betrayal, but within the context of the gathered meal. It is afterward, when the disciples are arguing about their own relative greatness, that Jesus predicts Peter’s denial.

In the gospel of John, during the gathering known as the Last Supper in the synoptic gospels, well, there is no communion. Yes, they are gathered around a table and, yes, Jesus speaks of both Judas’ and Peter’s betrayals. It is in John’s gospel that Jesus washes the disciples’ feet and gives them the one commandment, the love commandment.

In John 13:34 Jesus commands, *“Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you must also love one another.”* The implication was clear: serve just as I have served. Kneel and wash feet.

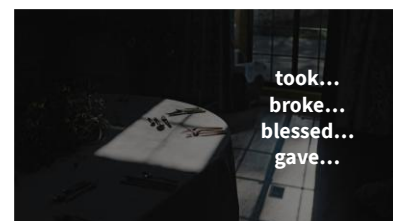


Stop the busyness and be present to one another. Slow down and be aware of one another, of needs, of ways to lift one another, to encourage one another, to support one another, and, yes, love one another.

Turning to 1st Corinthians 11, we join Paul as he recalls how Jesus and his disciples gathered around the Passover table. As practicing Jews, the disciples thought they were there to remember, to celebrate, and to honor what God had done for Israel. Around the table, Jesus and the twelve sat and slowly worked through the intricate rituals of the Passover meal. In verse 23, Paul notes that he *“received a tradition from the Lord.”* He is speaking of the new covenant that was initiated during this communal meal.

Paul tells it this way: *“On the night on which he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread. After giving thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this to remember me.’ He did the same thing with the cup, after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Every time you drink it, do this to remember me.’”* With these words, Jesus shared the bread and the cup, establishing the new covenant, sealed by his blood.

Tonight, as we begin to lean into serving one another through the washing of hands and the sharing in communion, we reflect on communion as part of who and what Jesus was. In almost every instance when Jesus fed people in the scriptures, Jesus “took, broke, blessed, and gave” bread. He did so in the stories of the loaves and fishes, in the meal at Emmaus, during the Easter breakfast on the beach. These four actions, or parts of them, occur multiple times in the gospels as well as in 1st Corinthians 11.



These are powerful actions. In the unfolding story of Holy Week, Jesus himself is taken, blessed, broken, and given. And as disciples so are we.

Tonight, as we join in the events of Jesus' final night with his friends, we do not eat and run, like the disciples did in the Garden of Gethsemane. As disciples of Jesus, we do not run away, but we run towards one another. That is how we live out his command to love one another. We run towards one another, towards those who are hurting. We carry our basin and towel with us, ready to cleanse and to heal. We run to one another, ready to gather in and to bind up. The hand washing, the sharing in the holy meal, these things are preparation. These rituals prepare us as the Passover prepared the Israelites, as the Last Supper prepared the disciples. The tending to one another, the washing of hands, the sharing in the meal, the making space for one another at the table – they prepare us to rise from the table, going forth into the world to love and serve all of the one another's we encounter in the world. The blessing of oil seals our commitment to love as Jesus loved. We gather tonight, preparing ourselves to eat and run – to run out into the world that needs to know Christ's love. May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.