

“Death and Deliverance are Near”

God’s people are slaves in bondage in Egypt, but the Lord has promised to deliver them. It’s a time of intense preparation – the angel of death will pass over the land – but those homes with the blood of the lamb smeared on the doorposts will be spared.

The instructions have been given – for the lamb, and the rest of the meal – for the blood to spare their lives – for the exodus, their deliverance from bondage. It’s near. Be ready to go. Have your sandals on your feet, your cloak tucked in and your staff in hand – eat in haste for tonight the Lord will bring death, and deliverance.

Each year after their exodus from Egypt, the people of Israel would celebrate the Feast of Passover. However, they now had time to slow down – and to remember what the Lord had done for them, and to give thanks.

Each year the father was to tell the story of the Passover and the exodus as his family gathered for the feast. The Lord had commanded that they teach this to their children. And so they did – reminding the family of all that the Lord had done to deliver them in the past.

However, each year the people of God continued to be surrounded by death – by enemies who sought to defeat and enslave them. Death is always near – but so is the Lord’s deliverance. At Passover, the family would also be directed in faith to that Greater Deliverance that the Lord would provide for them through the Messiah – setting them free from their enemies, and causing death to pass over them.

The Passover Feast looked back, as if the Lord had commanded them to “do this in remembrance of me” – and it looked forward, giving hope in a world full of death, to all who believe His promise.

Fast forward to the days of Jesus, and like all of God’s faithful people, preparations are being made to celebrate the Passover. St. Mark the evangelist gives us some of the details for the preparation – the venue, the menu and the guests (the place where Jesus will gather with His disciples to eat the Passover Lamb).

As some of you well know, because you are in the midst of it right now, there is a hectic-ness that comes with preparing for such feasts. On top of all that, Jesus knows what lies ahead for Him. He knows that death is near. He is the Passover Lamb that is being prepared for sacrifice. And yet, He slows down – to remember, to teach – and to give hope – for indeed, their Deliverance is near.

In the midst of the Passover celebration – Jesus institutes the Lord’s Supper. With His own death just around the corner – He takes time to give His last will and testament. He gives the bread – “this is my body.” He gives the cup of wine – “this is my blood of the covenant (testament), which is poured out for many.”

His Words bring back memories, they teach, and they give hope. “My blood of the covenant” is a reminder of the Lord’s promise concerning the blood of the Passover lamb in Egypt – when I see that blood, I will pass over that house, and death will not come to it. God’s people were reminded that – when death was near, so was the Lord’s deliverance.

At the time of our Old Testament reading – Israel is out of Egypt and in the wilderness, at Mt. Sinai. There, God speaks His covenant through Moses into the ears of His people – and the people respond with one voice – “All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do.”

Moses sets up an altar, and 12 pillars of stones (representing the 12 tribes of Israel) – and the covenant is sealed by the shedding of blood – and the blood is splashed upon the people of God.

Again, death is near, as evidenced by the blood – but so is the Lord’s deliverance, in the very words that He has spoken to them. And Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel “went up [on the mountain], and they saw the God of Israel ... they beheld God, and ate and drank.”

“This is my blood of the covenant,” Jesus says. Here in the Supper, this wine is His blood – poured out for many on the cross of Calvary – but poured out in the Supper “for you,” for “the forgiveness of all your sin.”

The covenant is sealed with the shedding of the blood of the Lamb of God – and now that blood is splashed on you as you drink of the cup.” As St. Paul reminds us: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation [or, a communion, a common-union] with the blood of Christ?”

“Do this,” Jesus says – and with one voice we respond, “All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do.” We will eat and drink His Body and Blood – and – do this in remembrance of Him.

Fast-forward to today and slow down, as we are gathered to celebrate the Lord’s covenant, His Supper, our deliverance. From our hectic lives, and from a world where death is evidenced each day – Jesus invites us to His Table, to behold Him by faith, and to eat and drink with Him.

The language from 1 Cor. 10 teaches us that, not only is there a “common-union” between the bread and the Body of Christ, between the wine and the Blood of Christ – but that there is a “common-union” with Christ, and all who eat and drink with Him.

“Do this,” He says – and we do. We eat and drink His Body and Blood – remembering that He gave this body into death, and shed this blood on the altar of the Cross. For Jesus, the Passover Lamb, death was near – but for all who believe the covenant, who eat and drink in faith – His deliverance draws near.

This IS “for you” – for the forgiveness of all your sin – which causes death to pass over you, and releases you from the captivity of your enemies, and from the bondage of your sin.

Dearly beloved, as you eat and drink this night – “do this in remembrance of me” – remember all that Christ has done for you in His Passion, death, and resurrection – but behold Him now, as He delivers you in the here and now – even as you look forward to seeing Him face to face, as you eat and drink with Him at the heavenly, and eternal, banquet feast. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and your minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.