

Maundy Thursday

4/1/21 CTK

John 13:1-17, 31-35; Ex 12: 1-14

Tonight is the sixth night out of nine nights of the Jewish Passover. Passover ends this year on April 4 – Easter Sunday. Every year in a way that feels almost magical, the Passover happens right around the time of the Passion of our Lord.

Typically on the first and the second of Passover Jews have a family meal together called a Seder. At the Seder meal on the second night, the youngest child of the family asks the question: Why is this night different from all other nights. And so begins the family's reflection throughout the meal about the meaning of this special night for the people of Israel. It's called The Haggadah, it sets forth the meaning of the meal, including the story of that we heard a few minutes ago about the first Passover, how on that night the children of Israel were freed from slavery to the Egyptians; how they fled into the desert with Pharaoh's army in pursuit after they had, under the cover of darkness, as the angel of death had visited the firstborn of every Egyptian family, the 12th plague the Lord visited upon the Egyptians. And how during the angel's visit, the Hebrew people ate their final meal in captivity - their first Passover meal, a ritual which God commanded them to do regularly every year to remember. The same meal that families gathered in their homes last Saturday and Sunday were eating.

This Passover story and whole story of the Exodus from Egypt, Moses and the burning bush, the people's journey through the wilderness and into the promised land led by God, is told again and again throughout scripture. We read it in the book of Exodus, then in Deuteronomy, then Isaiah and other prophets repeat it, then the poetic imagery of the Exodus in the psalms. This is the story of the central event in the lives of people of Israel. The story of God freeing God's people, keeping God's promise. And it still has meaning for us Christians because we say that is what happened for us in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. We call that the journey from captivity to sin into the freedom of salvation.

It was at Passover meal with his friends, you recall, or maybe as part of it, Jesus took a bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying take and eat, this is my body, broken for you. This is a central story in our lives of faith. These are called "the words of institution" because on that night Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. It was the night that he took the cup and gave it for all to drink saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this for the remembrance of me. And so we do it. And this was the beginning of Jesus passion, which will

continue tomorrow and the next day. As the Passover story and the Seder meal have been repeated countless times, so we repeat this story and this supper as often as we can. It's the story of who we were freed. We do this, as he tells, in remembrance of him and the freedom he bought for us with his life.

And then he showed us how else we could remember him. He washed his disciples feet and told us we should do the same for each other. And when this pandemic is really over, we will do that too.

Last year, the Maundy Thursday service was I think the 4th or so online service we did after having to vacate our sanctuary. Almost exactly one year ago tonight I ended my online homily that night by saying that it's common for Jewish families to sing or to say the words "next year in Jerusalem." as a reminder to the Jewish diaspora all spread out through the world and through the centuries, of the hope that someday they would be together, home again, in their spiritual home. And I suggested that maybe that could be our wish as well: next year at Christ the King.

Well, by the grace of God, here we are. Last Sunday, when we waved our palm branches and came back into the church. If it wasn't exactly a triumphant entrance, it was a welcome one, a blessed one, and wondrous one. So tonight we gather together have that meal in person, and tell the story of how in Christ, God has set us free. And we'll share this special meal on this night that is different from all other nights.