Maundy Thursday

Rev'd Peter Balabanski

Tonight, we've heard again how four of our ancient, sacred traditions began—the Feast of the Passover, the Lord's Supper, the Christian principle of Servant Leadership—shown by washing each other's feet, and the New Commandment—to love each other like Jesus loves us.

From Exodus, we heard the story of the first Passover—the final rescue of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt began with a meal where people ate standing up and dressed for travel—ready to flee at a moment's notice. It's called Passover for a strange reason. Before this meal, each household had to sacrifice a perfect, unblemished lamb and roast it over a fire. They had to daub their front door frames with blood from this lamb. The blood would be a sign to protect the household. God was sending the angel of death on Egypt to kill all the first-born in every household. But if the front door frame of a house was marked with the blood of a lamb, the angel of death would pass over without killing anyone within it. A short time later, the Hebrew people were delivered from slavery through the Red Sea.

We've read this story tonight because it connects with our Christian story. Ours tells of the blood of a perfect man being the means of our rescue from slavery. We remember this every week at Holy Communion.

Passover meals are happening this week too. Jewish people celebrate their rescue and thank God. They drink three cups of wine at this feast: the cup of sanctification celebrates the special bond they have with God; the cup of praise celebrates God rescuing them from captivity; and the cup of redemption celebrates God redeeming them so they are no longer slaves.

In this evening's Psalm, we read about another cup; the cup of

salvation. The Psalmist wants to offer it as a new sacrifice—a sacrifice of thanksgiving, offered by someone who knows freedom in God.

Paul links the imagery of Exodus and the Psalm to describe the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples. For him, Jesus is the sacrificial lamb and his blood is our protection. And Paul also names a fourth cup for remembrance of salvation, which proclaims the Lord's death until he comes.

Into this mix, the Church also gives us John' story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. It also happened at a meal—but not at the meal we might first think of. The meal where Jesus shared the Last Supper with his disciples in Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25 and Lk 22:7-20 was the Passover meal. But in John's gospel the meal where Jesus washed his disciples' feet happened before the Feast of the Passover.

In this Gospel Jesus will die on the day of preparation for the Passover 19:31. That's the time that the Passover sacrifices begin in the temple. So in this Gospel, Jesus is the lamb——the Paschal Lamb——the Passover Lamb——the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. This is the same as Paul's understanding; Jesus' blood will save us.

But now Jesus adds something new. During the meal, he takes off his outer robe. Now, clothed only in a loincloth, he ties a towel around his waist. And then dressed as a slave, he washes his disciples' feet. Then he says, "… if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."

This is the definitive picture of Christian ministry: the leader is always a servant, and service is always given for love. It's summed up in the New Commandment. We care for others like Jesus does as a sign to all people. This is why we've been set free—it's the reason God's people were freed

from slavery in Egypt, and it’s the reason we’ve been set free; free from slavery to futility and despair. We are set free so we can show people that God loves them; we show them by serving them and each other in love.

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.
This night, we remember his blood which is daubed around the doorframe of our souls; his blood which protects us from the angel of death. We remember that he’s the lamb who gave himself to be sacrificed for us; to free us from slavery; to lead us into a community of freedom and love; to build us up into a people willing to shine in the world’s night, like a bonfire of hope, burning on a mountaintop, guiding lost travellers to safety, to welcome, to love—to Jesus.

Grant, Lord, that we who receive the holy sacrament of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, may be the means by which the work of his incarnation shall go forward. Take, consecrate, break and distribute us, to be for others a means of your grace, and vehicles of your eternal love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.