

### **Exodus 12:3, 11-14**

Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord.

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For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

## **God's Truth in a Time of Chaos** - September 6, 2020

*Exodus 12:3,11-14*

I hope the words of our scripture today sound a bit familiar. They are important words, essential words, in fact, they are earth-shattering words. What we have just heard is part of the story of the institution of the Jewish celebration called Passover, repeated at Jewish tables around the world for well over three thousand years.

The Passover, as we may recall, was the event that ended the captivity of the Hebrews as slaves in the land of Egypt and resulted in the Pharaoh allowing them to leave after 400 years of captivity. God heard the cry of the people and called Moses to lead them into a new life of freedom and a new life of service to their liberating God.

Without Passover, there would be no Jewish Religion because there would be no Jewish people. And if there were no Jewish people, there would be no Christian Religion as well because our Christian faith is tied directly and inseparably to Judaism. Everything Jesus said and did has its roots in Judaism. Everything he taught us had already been taught many times and in many ways by the Jewish prophets and priests and rabbis — and still is.

For us to make the claim that Jesus is our Lord and Savior, we are also saying that Jesus, a faithful Jew himself, owes his teachings and ideas to what God accomplished through Moses and that Passover event so long ago.

But so what! That's a nice history lesson and all. Jesus was Jewish, the origin of Judaism begins with the Passover, etc. etc. etc. Besides, Passover is celebrated around Easter? Isn't it? Jesus was killed while he was in Jerusalem celebrating Passover with his disciples. In fact, isn't the Lord's Supper, which we celebrate this morning, related to the Passover meal as recorded in today's scripture?

Yes. All true. So why are we talking about Passover now, seven months "ahead of schedule" as it were?

While it is always appropriate to talk about the Eucharist and the fact that it is an offshoot of the Passover, talking about Passover and the Lord's Supper is especially important for us right now.

I don't know about you, but I'm feeling rather overwhelmed these days. As I mentioned last week, I cannot recall a time when so many crises have enveloped our nation and our world at the same time. There is Covid-19, which has infected over 6 million Americans and killed close to 200,000. There is the unemployment of at least 10 percent of our workforce. There are more hurricanes and wildfires than we've seen, certainly due in part to climate change. The poisonous seeds of racism sown for

400 years in this country are sprouting and people are dying and division is growing. Amid all this chaos we are expected to vote in a few months — many of us at a loss to know what is truth and what are lies — or even caring what is truth and what are lies.

We are indeed living, friends, in a post-truth era. What do I mean post-truth era? I mean that it is nearly impossible for even a handful of people to come together and agree about what is factual and what are lies. In all the crises I named above, there is massive disagreement about what the facts are and what the truth is behind them. There are huge numbers of people who say that Covid is not real, those who are out of work are just lazy because there are actually millions of jobs out there, climate change is not happening, and there is no systemic racism in our nation, just a few “bad apples” having a bad day at the golf course. Of the candidates running for office, who is telling the truth and who is lying? Aren't all of them liars to one degree or another? No, perhaps it's better to believe in conspiracy theories promoted by QAnon and so many radio and TV talk shows that assert we are all being fooled and manipulated by unseen forces outside our control.

This, friends, is the post-truth world in which we are living. Everything, I mean everything, is being thrown into doubt. We cannot trust anything or anybody, perhaps even ourselves. How can we possibly decide what truth is because anytime we say something, it can and will be knocked down by supposedly equivalent “alternative facts?”

We are living in a world where there is no common body of facts most of us can agree on. Truth may be true for you, but not necessarily for me. We like to speak of “being on the same page” that is — essentially being in general agreement about the way the world is and how it should work. But now, we are rapidly moving to a time when all people are on their own separate pages. What am I talking about?! Page? We're not even in the same book! We are all becoming little islands increasingly separated from each other. Perhaps some of us may, I repeat may, find some others with whom we can share common ground. But even then, it is much, much too easy to let our sense of unity collapse when someone brings some alternative facts to the table which to them seem perfectly valid.

Once upon a time, and even up to fifty or so years ago, the Church was for most people the one organization proclaiming a reliable standard about truth and living. Indeed, until the time of the Renaissance, about five hundred years ago, the Church was the final source of truth about everything. If the Church said the earth was flat, the earth was flat. If the Church said disease and poverty were caused because of your sinfulness before God, then you better get right with God or else. If the rulers of nations were bad, it was because God put them there and you better obey them regardless of what you think of them, else you were guilty of fighting God!

Over the years, of course, the Church has lost its authority when it came to scientific facts and the Church has mostly accepted the idea that disease is caused by germs and God actually does not approve of bad rulers.

Nonetheless, until fairly recently, the Church did enjoy genuine respect and authority when it came to teaching how people should behave toward one another. Yes, the Church made and continues to make many mistakes when it comes to issues of race, gender, sexual orientation and the dreaded “prosperity gospel”. However underneath all of that remains a strong, persistent teaching in nearly every congregation that love is the strongest force in the universe and that Jesus Christ, whatever else he represents, lived, died, and rose again because God so loved the world that God gave us Jesus.

Yet now, the Church has even squandered that teaching. From pastors of all denominations sexually abusing people while denying their abusive behavior, to other pastors personally enriching themselves and supporting certain businesspeople and politicians who have no ethics and no values, is it any wonder that the Church has lost its credibility? Sometimes I ask myself how can I put on this robe and talk to you about God when so many of my fellow shepherds have abused their authority and have no problem with their own hypocrisy. We don’t believe them — I hope — yet who am I that you should believe me? Am I any different from them and how do I prove it?

Welcome, friends, to 2020, the year where no one knows who to believe or what to believe. And even when we say we believe something, we can hardly defend ourselves or explain our beliefs because we have no shared set of facts. We have, therefore, lost our collective ability to be objective.

So here we are, a group of people who call ourselves Christians, yet shaken to our core about what is true and what is false and wondering if there is such a thing as genuine truth any more.

The irony of all this confusion is that our religion itself is rooted in one singular event. An event that simply cannot be proved at all by any human method of proof. Nevertheless, it is an event that is the central truth of the Christian religion, accepted and proclaimed by every denomination and every believer. That event, of course, is that Jesus died on the cross and God somehow raised Jesus from the dead. That, friends is the singular, most important, essential event of our Christian faith. You can either believe it, or you don’t, but if you don’t, you cannot claim you are a Christian.

Our Christian faith, therefore, is based on an unprovable truth claim. None of us were present when Jesus emerged from the tomb. None of us saw him meet with the disciples and others. All we have is the stories recorded in the Bible and two thousand years of people testifying that they believe Jesus

is real, is with them, and is working in their lives and the life of the world even now. Like it or not, we as Christians believe, or are striving to believe, in a truth we cannot prove.

But to go back deeper, Jesus's ministry is rooted in his Jewish tradition, a tradition which is also rooted in an unprovable truth. It's what we read today: God personally intervened in the life of his chosen people to free them from slavery. God "struck down" the firstborn of the Egyptians, but saved the firstborn of the Jews, identifying the who the Jews were because they painted the blood of a sacrificial lamb on their doors so the angel of death would pass-over the Jewish homes. This happened close to 3500 years ago. No one alive today was there. Yet the Jewish people exist because of their shared belief in the Passover event — just like Christians exist because of our shared belief in the resurrection of Jesus. Neither event can be scientifically proved. Yet for people of faith these are the most important truths in our lives.

The passover lamb was sacrificed, and the Jews were saved. Jesus sacrificed himself, and we Christians are saved. Is it any wonder we call Jesus the "lamb of God"? Jesus's sacrificial blood redeems our relationship with God. The Passover and the Resurrection vindicate everything taught by the prophets and endorse every action taken by Jesus. Together, they are the truth.

So what do these essential truths of our Christian faith have to do with the chaos of 2020? Everything! Humanity is, especially now, searching for truth. We are desperate for truth. So many false leaders have arisen in politics, in business, in religion: so many false messiahs claiming millions of willing and desperate followers. These false leaders exist as the direct result of our hunger for a truth to which we can anchor our chaotic lives.

But as Christians, we say the most important truth in life is not found in a human truth or in a human being. As we have plainly seen, the only thing human truths and human leaders have been bringing us is anger and division and chaos. We are tearing each other apart because we agree on less and less and less and mistakenly believe that we will be saved by science or wanna-be dictators.

Friends, we must abandon our foolish quest to find truth mostly in human leaders, or mountains of statistics, or science laboratories. All our supposed knowledge and wisdom is in question because so much of this knowledge has only bought us hatred and division. That doesn't mean science is untrustworthy. But it does mean that even scientific fact can be manipulated at the whim of leaders of all political persuasions often resulting in the needless suffering or death of millions. The CDC and the FDA are only the latest in a string of government agencies whose science-based work is undermined by twisted human truth. No agency, no organization, no political party is immune from manipulation.

Jesus said it and we must affirm the one and only genuine truth of life and living: Jesus is the way. Jesus is the truth. Jesus is the life. No one can come to God without Jesus because only Jesus has the words of eternal life.

The divisions that are destroying us today are the direct result of all of us, left and right, accepting only the parts of Jesus' message we agree with. Those with agendas that have nothing to do with Jesus take advantage of our faith, manipulating it, twisting it to fit the narrative that is most useful to them, and not to our community. Who can you trust? Who should you trust? Think about what is being said when you or your friends scroll through their Facebook feeds. Instead of nodding blindly when we see the words that make us feel good, we must instead open our eyes and help our friends to open their eyes and ask why such words ring true, whether from the left or the right. Are they true? Listen to what they are really saying. Question it. Compare it to what Jesus taught and did.

The only thing we as highly imperfect humans can do as we move forward is to learn what Jesus himself taught us — learn from his teachings, imitate his actions, study his message, understand what he did on earth and why he did it — then, through much prayer, find those women and men who are deliberately trying to come as close as they can to following his example. Those are the people, the very human, very flawed, very sinful people, just like us — whom we should be making our leaders, our teachers, and our guides. Hear the good news, the more of us who accept the life and teachings of Jesus as our standard and our truth, then translate our understanding into action, the more our divisions will fade and the spirit of love will grow. Let God's truth, not human truth prevail.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.