

March 22, 2015

Exodus 12:1-4 [5-10] 11-14

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.

Psalms 116:1-2, 12-19 (13)

1 I love the LORD because he hears my requests for mercy. 2 I'll call out to him as long as I live, because he listens closely to me. 12 What can I give back to the LORD for all the good things he has done for me? 13 I'll lift up the cup of salvation. I'll call on the LORD's name. 14 I'll keep the promises I made to the LORD in the presence of all God's people. 15 The death of the LORD's faithful is a costly loss in his eyes. 16 Oh yes, LORD, I am definitely your servant! I am your servant and the son of your female servant—you've freed me from my chains. 17 So I'll offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to you, and I'll call on the LORD's name. 18 I'll keep the promises I made to the LORD in the presence of all God's people, 19 in the courtyards of the LORD's house, which is in the center of Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

1 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.

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

1 Before the Festival of Passover, Jesus knew that his time had come to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them fully. 2 Jesus and his disciples were sharing the evening meal. The devil had already

provoked Judas, Simon Iscariot's son, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew the Father had given everything into his hands and that he had come from God and was returning to God. 4 So he got up from the table and took off his robes. Picking up a linen towel, he tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a washbasin and began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he was wearing. 6 When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus replied, "You don't understand what I'm doing now, but you will understand later." 8 "No!" Peter said. "You will never wash my feet!" Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't have a place with me." 9 Simon Peter said, "Lord, not only my feet but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus responded, "Those who have bathed need only to have their feet washed, because they are completely clean. You disciples are clean, but not every one of you." 11 He knew who would betray him. That's why he said, "Not every one of you is clean." 12 After he washed the disciples' feet, he put on his robes and returned to his place at the table. He said to them, "Do you know what I've done for you? 13 You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you speak correctly, because I am. 14 If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other's feet. 15 I have given you an example: just as I have done, you also must do. 16 I assure you, servants aren't greater than their master, nor are those who are sent greater than the one who sent them. 17 Since you know these things, you will be happy if you do them. Jesus said, "Now the Human One has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32 If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify the Human One in himself and will glorify him immediately. 33 Little children, I'm with you for a little while longer. You will look for me—but, just as I told the Jewish leaders, I also tell you now—'Where I'm going, you can't come.' 34 "I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. 35 This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other."

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, God's Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Some Greeks come to the disciples and say, "We want to see Jesus." Strange, perhaps, since Greeks are gentiles, and Jesus is a Jew, and Israel's law declares gentiles as unclean, as profane, as normal. And yet, they come, with expectant hearts, declaring with one voice, "We want to see Jesus."

An odd request, since Jesus before declared his mission not to the gentiles, but instead to the lost sheep of Israel, at least at first. Jesus' primary mission, to this point, was to Jews rather than these gentiles. And yet, they come, with eyes a gleam, reaching out with their words, "We want to see Jesus." An unusual request, since so many who came to Jesus wanted a particular kind of help or healing, a specific need met or prayer answered. And yet, they come, with a pregnant hope, exclaiming only these few words, "We want to see Jesus."

And of course, we want to see Jesus as well. Or do we? Do **we** want to see Jesus? Do we want to see Jesus as he really is? That may be one of the hardest questions for Christians to answer honestly. Why? Because the Jesus we want to see is often the Jesus we've constructed in our minds rather than the Lord who confronts us in the world. The Jesus we want to see is often the whitewashed, censored version rather than the unrated, unedited edition that cuts so clearly into our quick of our hearts. Do we want to see Jesus as He truly is?

As we walk toward Good Friday, that day that Jesus speaks of in today's Gospel, that day that even Jesus admits deeply grieves him, we've explored various perspectives on the cross. The cross as God's promise. The cross as foolishness to the

world and yet God's wisdom for salvation. The cross as the very place of God's healing forgiveness. Here, though, we're looking forwards, not backwards. Today we see the cross not as an ancient promise kept, not as an eternal hope met, not as an age old wisdom, but as strikingly, bafflingly, difficultly new. The cross is the fresh breath of God breathing new life into all creation. The cross is God's transformation, God's newness, for the church and for all creation.

When we talk about newness, about new life and transformation, these often come across as hopeful terms, as language of anticipation. Indeed, the mission of the ELCA's new campaign to support ministry long into the future is *Always Being Made New*. But of course this newness, this transformation, means change from the old ways. Newness means that something old may pass away. That's where the difficulty comes in. That's why, sometimes, it's hard for us to want to see Jesus, because we know that when Jesus comes on the scene, things change. Nothing stays the same.

The Gentiles came to the disciples and proclaimed, "We want to see Jesus!" Yet, as we anticipate what kind of change comes along with him, we must ask: Do we want to see *this* Jesus? The Jesus who brings newness? This Jesus who ushers in unheard of change? Do we want to see the Jesus we can't control?

The answer, of course, is complicated. We know that Jesus intends the best for us, that the newness God brings is abundant life. Somewhere deep within us we want to see Jesus because we know that without God our lives falter. Without God we stumble through the world rather than thrive in God's kingdom. We want to see Jesus because we seek an end to the dysfunction of sin in our lives. So, like the Gentiles, we come seeking Jesus because we hope for something, some kind of change, some kind of transformation.

And yet, even as we seek deliverance from sin, along the way we seemingly become addicted to the dysfunction of our lives. We so love our traditions, our habits, the things we're used to doing, that even when they become problematic, even when they hurt us or other people or God's creation, we continue to live that way even if it becomes an obstacle between us and God. Somehow, some way, these habits become idols in our lives. They begin to rule in the place of our Creator. **Newsflash:** That's a problem. If we want to see Jesus, if we want to meet the Lord, we must also embrace change, the kind of change that topples the idols in our lives, even those that we've come to know and love.

How many habits have we developed in our personal lives that keep us from seeing Jesus? We may embrace anger, such that our rage covers our eyes and keeps them seeing from Jesus. We may foster fear, such that a blindfold of anxiety blocks us from seeing Jesus. We may allow oppression, such that even our inaction becomes a darkness that obscures our vision from seeing Jesus. We may grab onto greed, such that our unending acquisition of things, our greedy gathering of cash, piles into mountains so so high and unholy that we can't possibly look beyond the stuff in order to see Jesus. In our own lives, our nasty little habits become oppressive idols that prevent us from seeing Jesus, that prevent us from finding the change we need, even if it's not the change we want.

Idols grow in our church habits as well, though they're often more difficult to identify on first glance. Some churches become so obsessed with the buildings, the structures, the physical plants, that ministry becomes secondary to structures. I know of one church, in another state I visited, that saw some great growth as a congregation. Yet, they became so concerned with building an addition that they ignored the

development of new outreach and ministry opportunities. Though their space grew, they stopped connecting people with the Gospel. They eventually built the addition, but by the time it was finished, the congregation was shrinking. If we're not careful, buildings can become blindfolds that keep us from seeing Jesus, idols that draw our attention away from God's mission in the world. In many places, I've seen some churches become so used to having the same ministry structures – having the same committees, or always meeting at the same times, or continuously scheduling the same events every year – that they don't realize the needs of the community have changed. The activities become idols that prevent us from asking a simple question: Is this what God is calling us to do in this place at this time? For instance, a church that attempts to run a vacation Bible school for kids in a retirement community without children seems caught up in the idol of the event rather than seeing Jesus.

If we're honest with ourselves, we may not always want to see Jesus, because seeing Jesus makes us realize the kind of change we need in our lives. We come to realize that we can't hide parts of ourselves from the Lord, for seeing Jesus means holistic change across our entire lives. Seeing Jesus forces us to see a newness in the world, a transformation of our lives, a new covenant, even when that's difficult for us.

But seeing Jesus makes change possible, even when we don't want to change, even when the change seems too drastic or difficult. Jesus is a radical. But fortunately, Jesus is the radical kind of person, the radical kind of God, who not only demands transformation, but Jesus also offers us the power and the ability to make that kind of transformation. When we see Jesus, we see the world not as it is, but as it might be. We see ourselves not only in our dysfunction, but with the hope of abundant life shaping our entire future.

The Word of God speaks to us words of hope, that transformation might come about, not just for the injustices of the world, but for the injustices in our own lives. Seeing Jesus helps us to see that neither anger nor fear need control our destiny. Seeing Jesus helps us to see that the future of our churches isn't tied to buildings, nor is it determined by the ministries we used to do. Seeing Jesus helps us see a hope for redemption far beyond ourselves. If we want to see Jesus, we must look for Jesus, not only in Scripture or in worship. And this means that, if we look deeply into the community around our church, in the people of the NRV, outside of ourselves and outside of these walls, we'll see Jesus there as well. Jesus at work, seeking to offer forgiveness and hope to all creation. Seeing Jesus in the places we least expect to find him will help us to change, not only for our own good, but for the good of the whole world. So look for Jesus. Dare to say, "We want to see Jesus," even if you're afraid to let go of the things that must change. For when we see Jesus, we find that even the most oppressive idols lost power as they may melt away in His justice and mercy.

That's the kind of new covenant God brings, the kind of new covenant that is sealed upon the cross. In the least likely place of human form, we find the God of the universe. In the least likely event of death, we find the power of resurrection. In the least likely moment of judgment, we find an eternity of forgiveness. So look for Jesus where you least expect to find him. You might be surprised, not only by the presence of God, but by the goodness of the change that God brings to you, your community, and your world. Amen.