

SERMON 849

Maundy Thursday

April 17, 2014

941st Week as Priest

767th Week at St Dunstan's

32nd Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

PASSOVER TO EUCHARIST

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

We celebrated the Passover together that night in the Upper Room, the same place we gathered after we entered the holy city. That night, our Lord did a most marvelous and wonderful thing: He transformed the Passover Seder, the most important act of worship in Judaism, into the Lord's Supper.

Like the others who are his closest friends, I am a Jew. Passover was our annual celebration of freedom from four hundred years of slavery in Egypt. But now it is more, much more.

In a little while, you will be witnesses to this remarkable transformation. In the place of the Matzoh Bread (the Bread of Affliction) and the Cup of Blessing from the Passover, you find the Bread and Wine of Eucharist, which becomes the Body and Blood of Christ.

But there's more, much more:

In the place of the Ark of the Covenant, or the family dining room table, we find the Altar and Holy Table of Communion. The ritual cleansing of hands before eating becomes the symbolic washing of the priest's hands by the lay Eucharistic minister.

The seat for Elijah the great prophet is now reserved for Christ himself. The sacrificed Passover lamb becomes the sacrificed Lamb of God.

The essence of Passover remains. It was a celebration of freedom from slavery and the promise of new life. Now it is freedom from sin, and new life in Christ. We still gather as a family, but now we are a church family—people who may or may not be related.

We still hear the stories of salvation history, but they are stories now brought to fulfillment in the coming of the Messiah, the Christ.

In a sense, it is true as Soren Kierkegaard said, that there is nothing genuinely new in Christianity, only borrowed, transformed, made new in Christ. But then, there is where Kierkegaard overlooked a most important element. Christ is what is new. He is Messiah, but he is also, essentially, uniquely, God made man. He is not just the Son of God (if that weren't enough), he is God the Son. And that is certainly new!

All of which leads to our concept of God, and who God is, now that we understand God as a Trinity of Persons yet One God. YHWH, the Jealous God of the Desert, the God of the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament is One. He chose his people and favored them with *chesed*, with loving-kindness. Now, in Christ, we know God's

Sacrificial Love, and the Salvation of the World in his Atonement for the sins of all. Now we know God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but this is the key difference in what God is doing in the world and in our lives: God comes to us as a human being, a man, and he (Jesus of Nazareth) is more than anyone imagined he might be. We are still trying to understand what it all means.

Jesus celebrated the Passover Seder this night more than two millennia ago, with his disciples in the Upper Room. But when he held up the Bread of Affliction, he told us that from now on this bread would be his Body, given for us. “Take, eat,” he said. “This is my Body.” And we believe, by way of Holy Mystery, that when Jesus said the Bread was his Body, that it *is*.

And at the end of the Seder, when we took the final Cup of Blessing, he held it up and told us that from now on this wine would be his Blood, poured out for us. “Take and drink this, all of you,” he said. “For this is my blood of the New Covenant.”

This was a transformative experience for us, a fullness-of-time moment. I hope that you experience the Lord’s Supper with the same power and authority as we did all those years ago. **AMEN.**

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