

Rev. Janet Doyle  
April 1, 2021  
Maundy Thursday  
Scripture: Psalm 116: 1-2, 12-19  
Luke 22: 1-34

## **Sermon: Life Together: The Miracle of Forgiveness**

The Israelites would never forget what they experienced that first Passover. The meal was special, but what God did that night was nothing short of a miracle. On the first Passover, God told the Israelites he was going to pass over all of Egypt and kill the first-born son of every family unless they sacrificed a one-year old male lamb without defect and put its blood on the doorframes of their houses. That would prevent death from entering the home.

God struck down all the first-born males with no blood on the doorframes and delivered his people from their slavery in Egypt. Every year the Israelites were to remember God's great deliverance by celebrating the Passover meal.

Jesus was celebrating the Passover meal with his disciples on his last night with them, which we now call Jesus' Last Supper, and we celebrate it tonight, calling today Maundy Thursday, which means "mandate" or in Latin "mandatum" which means "command". It was on the Thursday of Christ's final week before being crucified and resurrected. Jesus and his disciples had just shared what was known as the Last Supper and he was washing their feet. He said this commandment to His disciples.

In John 13:34 Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

Jesus sacrificially met His followers' deepest need—that of new spiritual life and the forgiveness of sins.

Romans 5:8-9 says, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!"

We cannot move too quickly to Easter. We must linger here with Jesus at His Last Supper and slowly move with Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane and the betrayal of Jesus by Judas and later in the Courtyard with Peter. Jesus knew what was going to happen as he journeyed to the cross. Jesus even prepared where they would have the last supper. He told Peter and John to enter the city, and you will see a man carrying a jar of water, and he will meet you and take you to the place for our Passover, and that is where you will prepare it. It was unusual to see a man carrying a water jar in those days for that was a woman's job, but Jesus had it all planned out, down to the smallest detail. He knew what was going to happen later.

Tonight, we sit and remember all that happened. Christ's death and resurrection is sometimes referred to as the "Paschal Mystery." The word **paschal** (pas-kuhl) comes from the Greek word for **Passover**. Remember the angel of death that "passed over" the Hebrew families before their exodus from slavery in Egypt. The lamb sacrificed and eaten at Jewish Passover celebrations was the **paschal lamb**, a term the New Testament writers also use for Jesus Christ. Jesus is our sacrificial lamb that takes away the sins of the world.

Isaiah 53:6 tells us, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." This paschal mystery involves God's hidden plan of salvation revealed in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, "Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said."

Max Lucado writes in his book, ***He Chose The Nails***, (page 106 Study Guide), "The paschal mystery is also understood as the recurring pattern of God's transforming work in our lives: that some form of death always precedes new life—and that death never has the last word."

It was God's plan all along to rescue and redeem our fallen world through the sacrifice of his own beloved Son. As we enter into the Upper Room tonight we have come to realize it is a meal of forgiveness of our sins, **once and for all**, as Jesus goes to the cross to die for each one of us.

He takes our sins upon his head in the crown of thorns and upon his back as he is beaten and upon his face as he is spit upon.

The Last Supper reminds us of what Jesus did for us. His body broken for us and his blood shed for us. The cup we take is the cup of forgiveness. The blood He shed was because He took our place.

Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

There is no other way to heaven or to get God’s forgiveness than by GRACE alone, through FAITH alone, in CHRIST alone.

Once you become a believer in Jesus that he died for you, your sins are forgiven and you can have a personal relationship with God! You become a new creation. The old things are passed away, behold the new creation has become. Jesus has opened the way to be in the presence of God because he is the sacrifice “once and for all.”

“For the Jews of Jesus’ day, God’s presence resided solely in the temple—specifically, the innermost room of the temple called the Holy of Holies or the Most Holy Place. Because God was holy and his people were not, thick curtains provided a separation barrier between them.” **(Max Lucado p. 60 He Chose the Nails Study Guide)**. Only the high priest entered the inner room and only once a year, with a blood sacrifice which was offered for the sins the people had committed. *(Hebrews 9)*

Now in the New Testament, with the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, we have a breaking down of the barrier that separated us from God when Jesus died on the cross. “And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” *(Matthew 27: 50-51)*

With the temple curtain torn, there was no longer a separation barrier between the people and God’s presence in the Most Holy Place. *(Hebrews 9-10)*. “But Christ came only once and for all time at just the right time to take away all sin by sacrificing himself...We are completely free to enter the Most Holy Place without fear because of the blood of Jesus’ death. We can enter through a new and living way that Jesus opened for us. It leads through the curtain—Christ’s body.”

Christ's sacrifice gives us access to God's presence. Jesus is our Mediator that opens the way to God so that we are forgiven and given eternal life. "For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (*Hebrews 9:15, 22*)

The Miracle of Forgiveness towards us means that we need to be forgiving toward others and to seek others forgiveness for our sins. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, we are reconciled to God. Our relationship to God is restored and so we are to reconcile our relationship with others.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17 the Apostle Paul says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Tonight, we celebrate the Lord's Supper, remembering that Jesus forgives us. Forgiveness from God is not only possible, but he wants you to have it and to live your life forgiven. At supper with his disciples he knew Peter would deny and would need to seek forgiveness. He knew Judas would die from his betrayal.

What do you need to give to Jesus tonight, this Maundy Thursday? What burden can you give him that will free you? What can you leave at the cross this year?

Jesus invites you to His table this evening—a place of forgiveness and new life. Come into God's presence and realize the miracle of forgiveness in your life.