

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Manasquan

March 20, 2008
Maundy Thursday

Texts: Exodus 12:1-14, I Corinthians 11:23-26, John 13:1-17, 31b-35

“Blessed are you, oh Lord, our God”

The First

“We children were restless, were fussy. Father wasn’t back yet. Mother was rushing in all directions, packing our things into backpacks, satchels, anything we could carry. I had a pretty heavy backpack myself. Grandmother was complaining as she mixed dough for baking. ‘No yeast; it will taste awful,’ she fussed. ‘Hurry mother,’ her daughter cried. The lamb was almost roasted. It was long past dinner time. Father suddenly flew into the room. We saw a little blood on the door as he closed it. Blood which had dripped down from the doorposts, onto the door itself. We sat down to eat and kept our shoes on which was not customary, and prayed, ‘Beruch ata adonai eluhenu, melech h’olam,’ which, as you know, means ‘Blessed are you, oh Lord our God, king of the universe.’ Grandmother’s bread tasted strange. It was flat and more like crackers than bread. Amazing what that little yeast could do to flour, but there had been no time for yeast.”

“That’s how it was,” sighed the old woman, who had been a child that first Passover night. “And after that.... The screaming and crying began as house after house suffered the death of the oldest animals, the oldest children. It was awful. Then we began to run, and we’ve been running and walking ever since. I’m ready to rest. But some things don’t change. This walking, for one. And this flatbread which we eat once a year --

every year -- to remember. To remember Passover, the day we got out of Egypt, away from our oppressors, saved by the blood of a lamb.”

The Second Many centuries later:

We were restless. Things were too quiet. Jesus had been talking about dying again. He had cried before entering the city, but when we finally did come in, people cheered and cried “Hosanna.” We didn’t know what to make of it. And when it was time to celebrate Passover, we didn’t know where we would eat. He just told us to go and tell a man -- whom we didn’t know -- to let us use his room, and the man did. So we prepared the dinner, we purchased the bread, the lamb, the wine, the herbs. But there was no one to wait on us and no one to wash our feet. It was quite strange when Jesus himself got a basin and began to wash our feet. It made us uncomfortable; we were sorry we hadn’t thought of doing it for him. But he said he had done it to show us that we were to love and serve each other.

You know, he already knew Judas would betray him -- but he still washed Judas’ feet. It was hard to have our feet washed when Jesus did it. We didn’t want to yield to his love, to his lesson. But we did and we’ve been washing one another’s feet ever since.

Then there were the odd words he said during the prayers over the bread and wine. Yes, he said the traditional prayers. Beruch ata adonai eluhenu, melech h’olam; Blessed are you, oh Lord, our God King of the Universe. But he also told us that the bread was his

body and the wine was his blood. Of course we remembered that the blood of Passover had been what saved our ancestors from slavery in Egypt. But how or why this wine should be Jesus' blood...well, it wasn't crystal clear to us.

But somehow we knew this bread and wine bound us together in a way we had never before been bound. And he kept saying, "FOR YOU. FOR YOU. FOR YOU...."

The Third Nineteen Centuries later:

Several men huddled in the shadows in the dark back of the cell. They talked in whispers so as not to draw attention. The moon was full and lighted the cell a bit more than usual. "Ja, it's acceptable," said one. "I received word from the Rabbi by way of Eli who works in the factory who told Jakob who works next to me in the field. The brown bread has yeast but in this circumstance it will be acceptable." As they huddled together, they prayed, "Beruch ata adonai eluhenu, melech h'olam. Blessed are you, oh Lord. Our God, King of the Universe." Passover in Bergenbelsen.

The Fourth A year or two later:

"It's Christmas Eve. Please allow us a few minutes together." The guards -- who would rather not have been serving that night -- grumpily escorted the bishop to his friend's cell and reported in to the Commandant. Suddenly the S.S. Commandant became suspicious. The friend was a count; no knowing what the bishop and count could be up to. He walked through the cold halls and stood guard himself. Through a tiny window he

watched the bishop open a cloth and lay out a piece of bread and a small container of wine. He listened carefully to every word. “In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples.”

The bishop survived his imprisonment and wrote later: “The wings of divine Mercy hovered over us as we knelt at the altar in a prison cell...We were...in the power of the Gestapo -- in Berlin. But the peace of God enfolded us; it was REAL and present, like a Hand laid gently upon us.”

The Fifth Some 60 plus years later:

People are kneeling or standing or sitting around Communion altars all over the world this night. For this IS the night we commemorate that awesome night in which Jesus was betrayed.

A young child holds up empty hands and is filled with peace, peace that will see him through his tiredness this night.

An astute business man kneels, remembering his dealings of the day, pledges love for his Lord and will think carefully about his work tomorrow in the light of this hour.

A tired woman bows her head and asks for strength to get through the next few days; her family life is difficult.

A man asks forgiveness with his believing heart.

Another asks God to give him faith to believe this miracle.

A worried senior begs for healing for the sick spouse.

A teenager wonders why she is here but when she hears the words FOR YOU, she is strangely touched by God.

An assisting minister thanks God for the opportunity to serve at this hour.

A pastor thanks God for his mercy and for allowing her to lift up bread and wine and to say the words of the ancient prayers out loud.

A lonely person remembers loved ones far away and loved ones who have died and holds them to his heart in this meal of the Communion of Saints.

“The wings of divine mercy hover over us at the altar...And the peace of God enfolds us; it is REAL and present, like a Hand laid gently upon us.” Beruch ata adonai eluhenu, melech h’olam. Blessed are you, oh Lord, our God, king of the universe....AMEN.