

Sermon

LCA Queensland District Bishop Paul Smith

Wednesday 3 October 2018

Text: Exodus 12:13

'The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you.'

Title: Merciful Lamb of God, grant us your peace

OPENING LHS 48

Solo Bishop Paul Smith

Lamb of God most holy, Who on the cross didst languish,
Patient, meek, and lowly, Though mocked amid Thine anguish:
All sin hast Thou borne for us, Else would despair reign o'er us.
Have mercy on us, O Jesus.

Whole congregation

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All sin has Thou borne for us, Else would despair reign o'er us.
Thy peace be with us, O Jesus.

Why do we pray this 'Lamb of God' prayer? Since ancient times, Sunday by Sunday, Christians have prayed and sung these words.

It was John the Baptist who first taught this title for our Lord Jesus Christ, when he saw the Lord coming towards him and declared, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'.

Each year, at Easter time, we are reminded that our Lord Jesus is the true Passover lamb, who was sacrificed, and has taken away the sin of the world. This language of 'lamb' directly connects all that our Lord does in his life, death and resurrection, to the grace of God at work in the story of the Passover.

Exodus 12, the story of the Passover, has been placed before us for our meditation on this first full day of Synod 2018. At the time of the first Passover, the people of Israel were in captivity and slavery in Egypt. Through Moses and Aaron, the Lord tells the people, very specifically, how to place the blood of a lamb upon the lintel and door posts of their homes. In the mystery of night, death passes over each household that is covered by the blood of the lamb. Across Egypt there is grief, but where the blood of the lamb covers the faithful, there is life and hope.

So what does it mean when we call Jesus Christ the true Passover lamb? Listening carefully to that declaration of John the Baptist, we hear exactly it means. John did not just say, 'Behold the Lamb of God!' He declared, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'.

That is what we just sang together, 'All sin he has borne for us'. The Lamb of God most holy gives us his holiness in exchange for our sin, that we would be right with God. Because of what he has done on the cross, we are passed over and declared righteous. And now there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus – else would despair reign over us.

So, we are NOT people of despair – therefore in the Agnus Dei song, we are taught to go on, to boldly pray: 'Have mercy on us'. We ask the Lamb of God – this true Passover lamb – to forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in his will and walk in his ways to the glory of his holy name.

But there is a second part of this praying to the Lamb of God: In that uncertain darkness in ancient Egypt, the blood of the Passover lamb placed upon the lintels and doors of each home meant a new beginning and a hopeful future for the Israelite people. From slavery to new life in the promised land of milk and honey. God was at graciously working for them, even in darkest night.

This hopefulness is captured in the third part of the 'Lamb of God' prayer, that has been handed down to us across the generations. We pray, 'Lamb of God ... have mercy on us', then a second time, 'Lamb of God have mercy on us', then finally the third time, the last line changes, 'grant us your peace'. We are taught to pray for the peace of the Risen Lord.

In his letter to the Romans chapter 5, St Paul unfolds for us, what it means to be granted peace by the Lamb of God. He writes, 'since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us'.

The text that was selected for this Wednesday devotion at Synod, Exodus 12, is actually one of the key readings set for Maundy Thursday. This Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world gives up his life, to guide our feet into the way of peace. In the supper, he gives us his own body and blood. Life is in this blood – to keep us in true faith to life eternal.

In chapter 7 of the book of Revelation, John, the evangelist, so beautifully describes the heavenly joy ahead for those who have been delivered through the blood of the true Passover Lamb: 'Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" ... he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb ... the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the

centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life".'

Let me end ... I became ever more deeply thankful for the selection of Exodus 12 for our Wednesday morning devotion at this Synod. This pivotal text from the Exodus story of the Passover focuses faith for our journey through these coming days – on the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This Scripture invites us to pray the 'Lamb of God' prayer, not just on Sunday but especially throughout Synod, to pray it every day – and throughout the day; to pray, remembering that this 'Lamb of God' prayer is not just about me – we don't say, Lamb of God have mercy on ME – it is 'have mercy on US'. This is a prayer that we pray for the church and the world – for each sister and brother beside you and around you:

Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us

Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us

Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, grant us your peace.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.