

Sermon #1,014: Exodus 12:14, Numbers 9:1-14
3-28-13 (Maundy Thursday), Bethany-Princeton MN

LORD'S SUPPER: SACRAMENT, A GIFT; NOT SACRIFICE, A COMMAND

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, we thank You that in the words of institution You simply and clearly state that in the Sacrament You come to us in Your own body and Your own blood; and that You want to give us the forgiveness of our sins, life and salvation. Help us to believe this, and to approach You not in fear or in the feeling of our unworthiness, but as children receiving a gift! Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ, who is "for you" in the Sacrament:

In our Bibles, when we are reading in the book of Numbers it feels like we are farther along. But we are really still back in Exodus.

The last chapter of Exodus, chapter 40, tells of the glorious event when the tabernacle was first set up and the Glory of the LORD came and dwelt there.

There is quite a bit of build-up to this: six chapters of detailed instructions from the LORD for how to make everything; and another six chapters dutifully reporting the actual making of the altars, the basins, the posts, the frames, the poles, the curtains, the altars, the basins, the priests' garments; the materials, gold, brass, fine twined linen, blue and purple and scarlet yarn, goats' hair, acacia wood, onyx stones. This comes after they'd already been through a lot: battle with the Amalekites, water from the rock, manna and quail from heaven, the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, the golden calf, lots of murmuring by them, interceding by Moses, and God relenting and not withholding from them the remission of sins.

Finally at the end of Exodus 40, the glorious presence of the LORD is with them in the tabernacle, behind the veil in the holy of holies. They could see that God was really present, by the visible cloud. Then, in our Bibles, come 27 chapters of laws in the book of Leviticus, law after law, which strike us as dreadfully boring; then the first eight chapters of Numbers, in which God gives even more instructions. It's hard to realize hardly any time has gone by since Exodus 40.

Here in Numbers 9, it's the beginning of "**the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt.**" In other words, it's exactly one year since they left Egypt. Back then God gave them a new first month. So on this New Year's Day, God reminds them what they *must* do on the tenth day:

Every man was to "*take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household,*" a lamb "*without blemish.*" Four days later, on the 14th of that month, "*the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.*" He said back in Exodus 12 that "**throughout your generations**" they were to keep it by a meal of remembrance. Now one year after the first Passover, they're in the desert but God is here to tell them that He meant what He said. They *must* keep it, *on* the calendar day on which He commanded them. He said: "**Let the children of Israel keep the Passover at its appointed time. On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall keep it at its appointed time. According to all its rites and ceremonies you shall keep it.**"

God was unyielding in this command. He provided a way for those who were ceremonially unclean to still do the Passover, but He said that a person who was able to observe it and did not, "**shall be cut off from his people.**" Foreigners who were part of Israel "**must do so according to the rite of the Passover.**"

What we see here is that although the Passover was connected to the Old Testament's great event of *deliverance*, the Exodus, a picture of *salvation*, and it was a preview of the true Lamb of God, the *Savior*, the Passover was not Gospel.

The Passover was a sacrifice. It was Law. When we come to the Lord's Supper tonight, we call that a sacrament. It is the Gospel. There's a huge difference! A sacrifice is something you do. In sacrifice, all the doing is by you. It goes from you to God. It's a human work. A sacrament is the opposite: in a sacrament, the only doing is by God. It's all His work. It's from Him, from heaven, to you.

There is a connection between the two, however. The connection is Jesus. Jesus fulfills the Law; He does it for you. You do not come to God by way of sacrifice, by you committing yourself and all that you have to God. Instead you come to God only by His sacramental way, by means of grace and gift, that He commits Himself and all that He has to you. This is what we learn tonight.

When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He wasn't starting from scratch. This rich history that we are hearing of the children of Israel is still important. You need to know about the sacrifices. We're learning this history this church year, so this Maundy Thursday is a special one for us as a congregation. We see what Jesus was doing. We have heard about the Glory of the Lord coming to be really present in their new tabernacle. We have heard that everything about those Passover lambs was a must, a command, that brought with it a fear of failing to do something and therefore being cut off from their people.

We can see that as Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, first He was doing the Law. Jesus was making the sacrifice. The sacrifice was Him. He was the Lamb without blemish being slaughtered. The long procession of lambs was ending. The blood was no longer to be gathered in vessels and sprinkled on the altar in the temple of Jerusalem. The altar is His cross.

But within the liturgy of the Passover, He declared that a change was taking place. So as Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, secondly He was doing the Gospel. Bringing the Gospel. In place of the old covenant of sacrifices, of man's working, He was instituting a new testament, a sacrament, which is all gift, only God doing and giving things. To you. For you. That's what the Lord's Supper is. It's Gospel. In the Sacrament, Jesus is teaching the difference between the Law and the Gospel, between sacrifice and Sacrament. Not only is it new, Jesus said, it is a new testament "in My blood," not the blood of all those lambs:

He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body, which is given for you" ... He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you."

This is where the Glory of the Lord is really present: in the little but mighty word **"is"** – **"This is My body."** This is how He comes to you in His glory, crucified and risen. The thick cloud in the tabernacle was preparing for this.

His real blood is not sprinkled on an altar as it was in the tabernacle. The altar is His cross. You come to that altar when you come to the Supper. His blood is sprinkled on you when you're given His blood to drink. As He said in tonight's gospel, through His words, in partaking of His blood **"you are clean."**

His real body is joined with yours – when you are given His body to eat. You eat His body so that, again in Jesus' words from tonight's gospel – you do **"have a part with Him"** – meaning you are one with Him, completely forgiven.

Now you are where the Glory of the Lord, Jesus Himself, comes to dwell. The temple is your body, and God has fearfully and wonderfully made you, crafting you much more skillfully than the tabernacle and all its furnishings. The body and blood go into the temple of your body and cleanse it. When you eat and drink with faith, you can say, *"My Savior dwells within me now"* (#325 v. 2).

Like the children of Israel you too wander in a wilderness. You've done your share of murmuring, you are overwhelmed by all the laws and your many sins, your life gets too filled with other things, your own things, and you feel like saying to Jesus: *"It's been too long since I've been here with you, I've forgotten You, I've replaced you, I've ignored you, and I've lost my way."*

But whenever you come to the Lord's Supper, it's really like no time has gone by. This is where everything that can be said about you is not said according to the Law of sacrifice, by how committed you are to God and His ways, but

what is said about you is only according to the Gospel, God's sacramental way of dealing with you, in which He not only says but shows that He commits Himself to you! He Himself, in His true body and blood, come into you to make you completely clean, His glory comes to dwell in you, just as it did on your baptism day. This is not only the forgiveness of sins, but life and salvation itself! Amen.