

The Story of Easter

Exodus 12.1-14

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ²This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ⁴If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. ¹⁰You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. ¹²For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

¹⁴This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

The theme for Holy Week is *The Story of Easter*. I am fascinated by stories. I love to hear them. I love to read them. And I love to re-tell stories. Stories are easy to remember. As we read or hear a story we can picture it in our mind. The more descriptive the story, the more entrenched it becomes.

Once a story becomes alive in our mind it becomes easier to remember and much easier to tell. Stories also have the power to reshape our own lives.

Tonight we hear the story of Passover. The Hebrew people were being persecuted by the Egyptians. As I read the story from Exodus maybe in your mind you thought of Charlton Heston playing Moses in *The Ten Commandments* or maybe it was something more recent like the DreamWorks' remake called *The Prince of Egypt* or maybe your mind thought of something entirely different. The Passover of God - a moment when God hears the cry of the people and gives the Hebrews specific instructions: take an unblemished lamb, slaughter it at night, and spread the blood on your door posts. When the angel of death comes along it will *Passover* your place. Then in verse 14: This day shall be a day of

remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

This story is told and re-told every Passover. Before that meal is eaten the story is told. In our gospel this is spoken in John 13.1: "Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. . . ." These disciples – these followers – these people that want to be with Jesus, at the Last Supper, they hear the story again of the Passover. God hears their cry and saves them from horrible destruction. This story was on their mind when Jesus shared with them what the Last Supper now means.

Sadhu Sunday Singh, the Indian Christian, tells of two young men seriously addicted to gambling. One of the young men came from a wealthy family, but the other was the son of a poor peasant woman. Both were arrested. For the son of the rich, the situation could be remedied easily. His family simply paid the fine and he was set free. But the poor woman's son was sent to prison. She could not afford to pay the fine.

This poor mother went to work in a stone quarry so that she could raise money to secure his release. One day, as she visited her son in prison, he saw blood on her hands. When he asked about it, she told him what she was doing. This son could see her frail hands bruised and bleeding from the sharp stones of the quarry.

Finally the day came when she had enough money to set him free. The fine was paid and the boy could go home. On the way home he met his former companion in vice who invited him to return to their old ways. But the poor boy replied, "I shall never gamble again. You may if you wish, for your release was easy. But I can never forget the blood on my mother's hands."

The story to be told tonight is about a figure in our Christian walk who did something for us. He said in those words as he instituted Holy Communion – the breaking of the bread and the pouring of the cup – *this is my body, this is my blood broken and poured out for you*. We remember tonight what Jesus did for us. You are forgiven. You have the chance to turn away from your vice. You have the opportunity to accept God's forgiveness. It is an easy story to remember. It is a descriptive story that we can re-tell. And it is a story that reshapes our life. Amen.