

The Fifth Day

Maundy Thursday; Series A

“Take, eat; this is my body. Drink of it all of you, for this is my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins”

Matthew 26:26-27

A lot can happen in a week. Consider this evening that the two greatest events in all of history each happened over the course of a week: the creation of the world and the redemption of the world. Each of these events involved a great divine week of work and a Day of rest. Creation Week culminated in the formation of mankind and accomplished the making of the entire heavens and the earth. And then God rested. The week that is called Holy Week or Passion Week, perhaps a better term would be Redemption Week, accomplished the work of man's salvation or recreation. And then Jesus rested in the tomb on the Sabbath Day.

Creation Week, which resulted in a perfect world (Genesis 1:31), was followed by man's fall and God's Curse on the world (Genesis 3:17). Passion Week, which culminates in the death and burial of the maker of that perfect world, is followed by man's recreation and the ultimate removal of God's Curse from the world (Revelation 22:3). A Tree (Genesis 3:6) was the vehicle of man's temptation and sin; another Tree (I Peter 2:24) was the vehicle of man's forgiveness and salvation.

It is fascinating to compare the events of the days of Creation Week and Redemption Week, respectively. What I would like to do in our sermon tonight, during our observance of Maundy Thursday, and tomorrow, during our observance of Good Friday, is deepen our meaning and understanding of the events in Jesus' life that happened on each day by devoting and reflecting specifically on the particular day in which Maundy Thursday and Good Friday falls during Holy Week and comparing it to its corresponding day during the week of creation.

Tonight is Maundy Thursday or Holy Thursday. Tonight is the fifth day of Holy Week. According to the accounts of the New Testament Gospel writers this is the night that Jesus was betrayed by Judas and given over into the hands of those who would carry out his crucifixion. This is also the night that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during a Jewish Passover Meal with his disciples.

On this fifth day of Holy Week, this Maundy Thursday, Jesus and his disciples gathered together in an upper room and remembered God's faithfulness to deliver his people from under the thumb of a ruthless oppressor we know as Pharaoh and from a land where they were oppressed that we know as Egypt. Through the sacrifice of a lamb, God "passed over" his people and spared them of the full blow of his wrath and judgment. And so during the annual celebrations and reenactments of the Passover meal a lamb became the symbol of God's deliverance and salvation for his people. It was a sign of his faithfulness. On the fifth day of Holy Week an animal, a lamb, was the focal point.

Consider the fifth day of that other divine week, the Week of Creation. In the very first chapter of the very first book of the Bible we read that on the fifth day of the week our God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.' So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good . . . And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day" (Gen 1:20-21, 23). On the fifth day of creation animals were the focal point.

As the Lord thought about the shedding of the blood of that last Passover lamb on that Fifth Day of Holy Week, I can imagine him also thinking of the Fifth Day of Creation Week, when He had first created animals. Throughout the Old Testament the "life" of certain animals would be accepted as an atonement for sin we heard in our reading from Hebrews (Leviticus 17:11). Surely the shedding of the innocent blood of the lambs on that last Passover feast would recall the far-off day when the "life" in that blood had been created.

On the fifth day of the week of creation we read in the Book of Genesis that God first created animal life. On the fifth day of Holy Week Jesus ate a Passover meal at which an animal, a sacrificed lamb, was the focal point. There is only one problem. At the Passover meal that Jesus ate with his disciples there was no lamb. Most scholars and interpreters of the New Testament are in agreement that Jesus and his disciples ate a Passover Meal of unleavened bread, not uncommon at the time, especially for those Jewish people who were not able to have a Passover lamb sacrificed at the Temple in the city of Jerusalem. At a remembrance meal in which an animal, a lamb, is supposed to be the focal point, there does not appear to be a lamb.

In Genesis, chapter twenty-two, far before the time of Jesus, we read about God testing his servant Abraham. God told Abraham to take his son Isaac and sacrifice him on a mountain. As Abraham and Isaac were climbing together to the top of Mount Moriah with all of the tools for a sacrifice, Isaac noticed that the lamb was missing. He said to his father, Abraham, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham responds, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering my son" (Gen 22:7-8).

One day in a town near the Jordan River called Bethany in a region called Judea, not far from the holy city of Jerusalem, a man named John the Baptist looked up and saw Jesus of Nazareth coming toward him and cried out, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29)! At last our God has provided the lamb.

On that fifth day of Holy Week at the lamb-less Passover meal of remembrance that Jesus ate with his disciples there was a lamb that was the focal point. Not an animal but the Sinless Son of God who would soon become the sacrificial Lamb of God. And this lamb spoke and with his words he transformed the Passover Meal. "Take, eat; this is my body" (Mt 26:26). "Drink of it all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:27-8). Now a meal would be eaten no longer to remember God's old Exodus work of delivering his people from slavery and bondage in Egypt and from Pharaoh, but the meal would be eaten to remember God's new

Exodus work of purchasing the forgiveness of sins. Because he, the Lamb of God, became our Passover (I Corinthians 5:7), even death itself would soon be swallowed up in victory and life (1 Corinthians 15:54). Indeed, a lot can happen in a week.

This week, this Holy week, through the strength of God's Spirit may you believe more firmly that the fruit of the sacrifice of this Lamb of God is for you. God has provided the lamb of price in order to pass over all your Sin. All your Sin is forgiven. The forgiveness, life, and salvation he purchased is for you. For the repentant, believing, and baptized children of God, the new Israel, nothing you and I can say or do or think is able to separate us from the love purchased for us through this sacrificial lamb. Now we join in singing the song of the Lamb.

On the fifth day of this Holy Week I would like to end the sermon by drawing our attention to pg.210 of the *Lutheran Service Book* where we find the words of the song, "Agnus Dei." We will sing this song in just a short while right before we partake of the feast of the Lamb of God in the Lord's Supper tonight. Hear right now the words of that song in conclusion and reflect for a few moments on the cost of the sacrifice of this lamb on the fifth day of the week of God's redemption: "O Jesus Christ, true Lamb of God, you take the Sin of the world away; O Jesus Christ, true Lamb of God, have mercy on us, Lord, we pray. O Jesus Christ, true Lamb of God, you take the Sin of the world away; Have mercy on us, Jesus Christ, And grant us peace, O Lord, we pray." Amen.