

Signs  
Exodus 12:1-4,11-13; 13:1-8  
John 13:1-17, 33-35

Westminster Presbyterian Church  
Pastor Doug Browne  
October 4, 2020

Exodus 12:1-4,11-13; 13:1-8

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell 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. If 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. This 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. For 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. The 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.

The Lord said to Moses: Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and animals, is mine. Moses said to the people, "Remember this day on which you came out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, because the Lord brought you out from there by strength of hand; no leavened bread shall be eaten. Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out. When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your ancestors to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this observance in this month. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival to the Lord. Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen in your possession, and no leaven shall be seen among you in all your territory. You shall tell your child on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.'

John 13:1-17, 33-35

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe

them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

When our story starts, the Hebrew people are still in Egypt. These are the descendants, a couple generations later, of Joseph and his brothers. They have grown into a mighty people, so mighty that Pharaoh is afraid these immigrants will come to outnumber the native Egyptians, and that they'll take over. Pharaoh has responded to his fear by enslaving the Hebrews, and even ordering midwives to kill baby Hebrew boys.

Moses and his brother Aaron have been negotiating with Pharaoh to let the Hebrew people leave Egypt. Negotiations are going so badly that God

has unleashed nine plagues on Egypt, one after another, and Pharaoh is still not budging.

God has the Hebrews all feast one evening. God tells them to put blood from the freshly slaughtered lamb on the doorposts as a visible sign of their obedience to God, to tell the angel of death not to kill the firstborn under that roof. Finally, the Pharaoh lets the Jews leave Egypt, and they go. They walk dry-shod through the Red Sea, and watch the cream of the Egyptian army drown trying to follow them. God had rescued them from slavery.

Ever since that year, the Jewish people eat this meal, following, more or less, these same instructions. Every year the Jewish people eat the same menu, and they tell the story of God rescuing the Jews from slavery. This story tells the Jewish people who they are. They are the people whom God rescued from slavery in Egypt and turned into God's people. Every year, all the Jewish people, all around the world, celebrate God saving their people from slavery.

This meal is a sign. A visible sign that they remember what God has done for them, and that they continue to obey God to this day. A sign that they remember that God is present today, just like God was present thousands of years ago.

Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples. Jesus gave the disciples some visible signs. He broke the bread and gave it to them; he had them all drink from the cup. He told them, "Do this in remembrance of me." This, too, is a sign. A sign that we remember that God is present today, just like God was present thousands of years ago.

And he does something else, something that only John tells us about.

Washing a guest's feet was an unpleasant task done by the lowest slave or servant on the totem pole. Remember, New Testament people walked everywhere, on dirt roads, wearing sandals. Roads with a lot more animals than we're used to seeing. If you think about that a moment, you can imagine how disgusting their feet got.

For Jesus to do this was unpleasant, I'm sure, but, at the same time, it was an act of love. Those of you who have changed someone's diapers know what I'm talking about.

For Jesus to wash the disciples' feet is to turn the hierarchy upside down. Their rabbi, their teacher, God, is washing their feet like a slave. This is a sign Jesus gives them of how he loves them.

We're not supposed to have rigid hierarchies, with some people better than others. "The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted."

Then Jesus tells his disciples, “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” If Jesus can wash his disciples’ feet, they can’t then say that any task of love for their neighbor is beneath them.

Every time we eat this bread and drink this cup at the Lord’s Supper, we do remember Jesus and all that God has done for us. That is a sign.

And there’s another sign here. One that we should be practicing every day.

“Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” That is a sign of who we are. “Everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

If we love each other like Jesus loves us, our words will show it. Even more than our words, our actions will show it. Even more than our actions, our attitude will show it. Not just what we say and what we do, but how we say it. How we do it.

And Jesus told us to love our neighbors. Even our enemies.

That is so different from how the world works out there, it's intended to be a sign to the whole world. A sign of God's priorities. A sign of how God intends the world to be.

If everyone who says they're a Christian did that, really loved even their enemies, it would change the world.

Look around you. Look at the screen. This isn't a huge group. But Jesus taught us that the Kingdom of God grows like a mustard seed, from the tiniest seed you can see to taking over the whole field.

Let's start here. Let's start now.

I love you.

Amen.