

040723 – Good Friday

Last night for Maundy Thursday the reading from Exodus revealed that the Israelites were to take a young lamb and place it in their house for four days before they slaughtered it. They had to spend time with this lamb inside their home for four days. Which means they would have fed this lamb and pet this lamb and dreaded slaughtering this lamb. To slaughter a lamb that you have grown to love would be incredibly painful. It would come at great cost.

Today in Genesis, we see Abraham agreeing to slaughter his own son. This would be incredibly painful and come at great cost. This is the son whom Abraham and Sarah waited for until they were in their 90's to give birth to. Isaac was the son of promise. Yet as much as Abraham loved Isaac, he loved Jesus more. And I say this because I believe when the Old Testament speaks of the Angel of the Lord that it was Jesus in preincarnation appearances. And not everyone may agree with me about this, but there are at least twelve passages in scripture that define *the* angel of the Lord as speaking as God, identifying himself as God and having the responsibilities of God and so *the* angel of the Lord is different than *an* angel of the Lord or *hosts* of angels or other angels who are specifically named or even the angel of death mentioned in Exodus. In fact, today in our reading even, the Angel of the Lord says, "I swear by myself." If this were merely *an* angel they would not swear by themselves for they act under the authority of God. But so, Abraham refers to this being that would visit him as the Lord. In Genesis 18:3 Abraham calls this being who would visit him as, "My Lord." Just as David refers to "My Lord," and Jesus teaches us that when David speaks of "My Lord" that he was speaking of he himself, Jesus. And so, I believe it was Jesus who appeared to Abraham as the Angel of the Lord repeatedly in scripture and the Lord promised Abraham that a son would be born to him through whom a descendent would come who would bless all nations. The Lord visited and guided and spent time with Abraham in very personal ways to include intervening to save Abraham's nephew, Lot, and Abraham had grown to love Jesus. Abraham makes a prophecy today saying: "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering my son." As scripture often does, this statement is spoken on two levels because a ram immediately

appears caught in the thicket for the sacrifice, but Abraham was also prophesying about the lamb God would provide to become the burnt offering for the entire world. Jesus.

Last Sunday we celebrated Palm Sunday together as parishes when we walked down the street waiving Palm Branches for the lamb of the world. We love this lamb of the world, or we would not have unabashedly paraded down the dusty street shouting about Jesus. Likewise, the people of Jesus' day had grown to love Jesus, because he had spent time with them and they with him. The people waiving palm branches were so in love with Jesus, they wanted him to become their King and they believed him to be the promised eternal King called Messiah. They believed this because of the miracles. In fact, when Jesus tells the crowds, in the Gospel of John that he is going to be lifted up on the cross, the crowd counters with—but: “We heard from the Law that Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up?” This notion of Jesus being killed was mortifying to them because they believed him to be the Messiah who would remain forever. The crowds loved Jesus for spending time with them. He had walked among them, not like the religious leaders aloof in long fancy robes with hem bells, but rather homeless and walking among them and healing their loved ones and feeding them and teaching them the words of God in an authoritative and extremely personal manner. He ate with them and drank with them and held their children in his arms and spoke with outcasts and treated women with equal respect and celebrated with them and wept with them. The people loved Jesus and they did not want to see him slaughtered.

This is why the religious leaders had to take Jesus at night. This is why they had to have an insider tip them off as to where Jesus would be located at night preferably in an outlying area. The religious leaders did not need someone to identify Jesus, because they all knew what Jesus looked like. This is why after apprehending him in the Garden, Jesus says to the High Priest, “I spoke openly to the world – I always taught in the synagogues and at the temple, where all the Jews come together.” Jesus says this because he knows why they seized him at night. Had they seized Jesus openly in the crowds there would have been a revolt *with the very stones crying out* because the people loved Jesus so much. The people whom Jesus had spent time with did not want to see the lamb of the world sacrificed.

But just as the Exodus from Egypt required blood pressed on wooden posts from the Passover Lamb to deliver the Israelites from the angel of death and slavery to a nation that worshipped idols, so our deliverance from death and slavery to sin required the blood of our Passover Lamb to be pressed upon the wood of the cross. Our deliverance came at the great cost of the lamb whom we have grown to love because *it is He who has first loved us.*