

A Sermon by the Rev. Jeffrey A. Packard	Prepared for the congregation of Christ Episcopal Church, Spotsylvania, VA
To be delivered on March 24, 2016	On the occasion of Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-14

### The Blood of the Lamb

The People of Israel were slaves. Their oppressors worked them beyond their limits because they were afraid of them. They had become too populous, too powerful. Pharaoh knew that if they decided to rise up against him, especially if an enemy were attacking, the People of Israel would destroy the Egyptians. So he devised an evil plan. Every boy born to the Hebrews would be thrown into the Nile River. Only the girls would be allowed to survive. In this way, Pharaoh could control them and limit the threat that they posed. The plan worked for the most part, but one mother placed her newborn son in the river inside a basket so he would float. Pharaoh's own daughter found the boy and drew him out of the Nile. If Pharaoh had known that this boy, once he became a man, would save his people and deliver them from Pharaoh's grip, he would certainly have thrown him back into the river.

When the man, Moses, came before Pharaoh to ask for his people's freedom a duel began. It was a duel between Moses and his brother Aaron, and Pharaoh, the king of the Egyptians; but it was also a duel between the gods of the Egyptians and the God of Israel. Ten plagues were wrought by Israel's God on the Egyptian king and his people. In some cases, the wise men who worked for the Pharaoh could replicate the same results with their magical arts. Finally, though, they were stumped, and unable to keep up. It was not until the tenth plague that Pharaoh would give in. The tenth plague gave Pharaoh a taste of his own medicine. The first born of all flesh, humans and animals, would be killed. This would include Pharaoh's own son. But with the threat of death, God provided to his People a way to be saved from death. He gave them a method to protect their homes and their families. It would take the blood of a lamb.

The lamb, perfect and without blemish, was to be sacrificed at sundown. The blood of the lamb was to be spread on the doorposts and lintels of their homes. That blood would ensure that the angel of death would Passover those houses. Generations before when Abraham, the father of this People, was directed to sacrifice his own son, Isaac, his only son, the boy had said to his father, "Father, the fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" To which Abraham replied, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son." And he did. God prevented Abraham from going through with the sacrifice, and provided a ram with its head caught in a nearby thicket. For Abraham's faith in God, God restored his son to him. Abraham was willing to go through with the loss of his beloved son to follow God's will. Even though he might have refused, and he might have been seen as heroic for refusing to sacrifice his own son, Abraham believed that God would provide a way, even when he was not able to see any possible way. Abraham trusted God.

The People of God in Egypt also trusted God to deliver them. They went through with the sacrifice, and the application of the blood. That night such a wail arose in Egypt that Pharaoh pleaded with Moses that he would take his people and leave their land. The blood had protected the People of Israel, and the Egyptian first born of all flesh were now dead. Generations later, as he ate the meal that commemorated that incredible act of God to save his people and to provide a way where there was no way, Jesus spoke about the cup of wine as his own blood that was poured out for his followers. This man, whose birth was announced to shepherds in the fields who left the lambs under their charge to go see him, this man who had been called the 'Lamb of God,' was about to be sacrificed. He would die and his blood would provide protection from eternal death, just like the blood of the Passover Lamb had done in the past. His death would provide a way for those who follow him. They would find in his teachings, in his death, and in

his resurrection a way that leads to eternal life. His blood would be a blessing for the whole world. His sacrifice would signal the end of sacrifices; it would be the ultimate sacrifice.

Tonight we remember his sacrifice and we celebrate the way that his blood has provided for us—the way of the cross, the way of suffering and death which leads to eternal life for those who follow. We keep this New Passover, given under this New Covenant, that creates a new People of God. The blood of Jesus Christ, which has been poured out for us and for our sins, washes us clean, makes us part of this new family of God, and calls us to follow in faith trusting in God to provide the way.

Amen.