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<sup>12</sup> 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 judgements: I am the LORD. <sup>13</sup> The blood shall be a sign for you. Exodus 12:12-13a (NRSV)

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At the moment in our world there are many things that can occupy our attention: Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Irma with their death tolls; the tension on the Korean Peninsula and threats of Nuclear War; the earthquake in Mexico; the many people at the moment dealing with the heavy monsoonal rains (particularly in Bangladesh) with a death toll of more than a 1,000 and nearly 2 million students shut out of school; the famine in South Sudan (with 5 million people at risk, with over 1 million being children); people who have received difficult health news; people we know in conflict; those experiencing anxiety and depression; and many others who feel overwhelmed by events around the world, and in their local community, and surrounding their lives. And all this in the past week!

Have you ever felt overwhelmed by all these things? Have you ever pondered questions about the ‘nature’ of ‘God’ that such things could happen?

We may indeed ask questions such as these: “Is there a ‘God’? If there is a ‘God’, how can a ‘loving God’ ‘allow’ such things ‘to happen’? “Indeed, I call on the name of ‘the Lord’, but why doesn’t He seem to help me?” Where shall we find help in our time of need? Is it all really left up to ‘me’?

In our First Reading this day (Exodus 12:1-14) we have the account of the Israelites about to leave the land of Egypt. The backstory to this is that some 400 years beforehand a family group (Jacob’s family) had arrived in Egypt as ‘refugees fleeing famine’. Jacob’s ‘favoured son’ (from the second wife) had become Pharaoh’s ‘right hand man’. Israel’s family had a ‘privileged position’. But over time, as this family grew and became a significant ethnic group in this ‘foreign land’, they were persecuted and oppressed. But amongst the people a significant leader emerged. His name was ‘Moses’. And Moses had been tasked with leading these people from a land of slavery into a land that promised freedom – not that the people themselves always wanted, or appreciated, the freedoms that were about to be given.

And so, after many incredible signs and wonders, the time had come for these people to find freedom. And, at the time when we now get ready to celebrate Easter, the people of old prepared lambs or goats as they had been told, painting the blood over their doorways, and eating the body of the lamb. And so – with the body and blood of the lamb (as well as the eating of unleavened bread) – they would be released from trial, spared from death, and have strength on the journey toward freedom.

Mention the word “blood” and the average listener will squirm. Mention the word “blood” from some pulpits today and the pastor will be considered insensitive or distasteful. Why bring up unpleasantness in the middle of a church service? Therefore, some churches avoid singing great hymns such as “Nothing But the Blood” and “There Is Power in the Blood.”

Christianity is based upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. The shedding of His blood is paramount to His purpose on earth: “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:17). For, as the writer of Hebrews states, “...Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22)

Since the Garden of Eden, God has been preparing the world to receive the message about the blood of Christ. The work of Christ on the cross is foreshadowed in this great chapter in Exodus.

John the Baptizer saw Jesus and he declared, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, 36). "The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10).

The apostle John recognized this great truth when He wrote that Christ "Himself is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:2). "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). Romans 3:25 speaks of Christ "whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith." Christ is the means whereby our sin is covered. The great application that comes out of the Passover sacrifice is the assurance and security of our salvation through the Lamb of God.

This understanding, then, of the Passover being about ‘salvation’ and ‘deliverance’ will also affect our understanding of our other Bible Readings this day (Romans 13:8-14 and Matthew 18:15-20).

When we look at the pain and suffering in this world; when we feel overwhelmed by the loss that we see around us; we must remember that God is with us. We must allow him to work in the midst of lives.

There is something very beautiful in our Gospel this day. Very often when we listen to these words about ‘reconciliation’ between Christians, these words are often reduced to a ‘procedure to follow’ (3 steps toward reconciliation, or ‘how I can no longer need to bother with someone who annoys me, as long as I follow the 3 steps’). But there is something much more at work here. Jesus says our aim should always be to win another person over (Matthew 18:15). That’s the aim of bringing along other people, or even involving the church. And what did Jesus do with ‘unbelievers’ and ‘tax-collectors’ in His time? He ate with them, and had fellowship with them. He did not condone unbelief or unjust practices, but he reached out to others in love (and when we look at what is before these words in Matthew 18:15-20 we have the account of the ‘lost sheep’ [Matthew

18:10-14], and after follows a parable about an ‘unmerciful servant’ [Matthew 18:21-25], and Jesus concern for the ‘little ones’ [Matthew 19:13-15], even as Jesus gives some very challenging words for many people about marriage and divorce [Matthew 19:1-12]).

In the trials and troubles of this world we are to see that God indeed is with us. This is the word of Jesus Himself (Matthew 18:20: “Yes: where two or three come together in My name, I’ll be there in the midst of them.”

Jesus is with us. The Passover meal in Exodus 12:1-14 continues to this day as a central festival for the Jewish tradition. The meal, however, also has meaning for Christians as the background for meal of Holy Communion.

Jesus is our Passover lamb. Just as we trust that when we eat this bread and drink from this cup we are somehow receiving the body and blood of Christ, we know Jesus is with us. He gave his life for us. And, as we celebrate communion, we remember this. We rejoice in the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf. And this will affect how we live and what we do.

But there is another dimension as well. The Jewish Passover recounted God’s deliverance of God’s enslaved children—how with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm God acted to liberate His poor, enslaved children. But they were called to celebrate the Passover again and again. Likewise, Christians celebrate the Lord’s Supper again and again. And we do this knowing not only our own need, but the needs of those around us. In this world God’s work is still yet to be done. And salvation is meant to be brought from God’s people into a hurting world. Still God works to deliver the oppressed, those suffering in exile or servitude or sin. So the Passover meal reminds us not just what God did, but what God is calling us yet to do in the world.

And when you take the bread in Holy Communion, know that Jesus offered His body up for you. When you drink from that cup, know that Jesus’ blood has set you free. When you celebrate communion, remember God’s faithfulness in the past.

Imagine the wondering eyes of the disciples as Jesus might well have taken up the cup of wine reserved for the prophet Elijah during the Passover celebration, changing its meaning as well: Take. Drink. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you and others for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. Why is this meal different from all the others? Perhaps it is because in it we remember how Jesus really has passed over from death to life and how he has given us this life, too.

Know that God stands with you in the darkest place and comes alongside you and walks with you. His promise and gift is to be with you, and God does not stand apart from our suffering. And so we may look to the future in confidence – in the confidence of God’s true love for us. Remember that God is promising to be with you today and always. Amen.