

Jesu Juva

“Not a Lifeless Calf - A Living Lamb”

Text: Exodus 24:3-11; Hebrews 9:11-22; Matthew 26:17-30  
(with a little Exodus 32 thrown in too!)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

They were fresh out of Egypt, the people of Israel. Not many days had passed when they arrived at Mt. Sinai. Fresh in their minds were the memories of what happens to those who harden their hearts against the Lord. They had seen the desolations carried out through the plagues in Egypt. They had seen Pharaoh and his army drowned in the Red Sea. So when Moses speaks the Word of the Lord to the people, they say *yes! All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do.* Yes, yes, YES! We don't want that to be us.

And then Moses throws blood on them. Gross, right? But they had just seen that too. On the doors of their houses in Egypt. That was the blood of the covenant God made with them, that when the angel of death swept through the land, he would not sweep them up in that last and final and greatest plague. And now blood was being splattered and smattered on them. Not on the doors of their houses but on the doors of their hearts. The blood of God's covenant of peace and fellowship, or communion, with them.

And thus at peace with God, Moses and Aaron, their assistants, and seventy of the elders of Israel, as representatives of all of Israel, ate and drank with God. Things were good.

And then it all fell apart. Just as quickly as it came, so did this peace and fellowship vanish. They did as Pharaoh had done and hardened their hearts. For when Moses took a little too long up on Mt. Sinai, they built a golden calf - an image of the animal whose blood had just been splattered on them. And the cry went up: *“These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”* And they worshipped and sacrificed, and partied and played (a word which probably has sexual overtones) before the image *in the name of the Lord* (Exodus 32:1-6).

A golden calf. A calf with no blood. But as the author of Hebrews told us tonight: no blood, no forgiveness. And no forgiveness, no fellowship, no communion, with God. And even if it was a image of the animal whose blood had just been splattered on them, that blood could not save. That blood was the blood of a substitute, a foreshadowing of the *real* blood that would be poured out for the forgiveness of the sin of the world. They got it all wrong, which is what always happens when you depart from the Word of the Lord.

Well the Lord saw what had happened, and so said to Moses: ***I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may***

*burn hot against them and I may consume them* (Ex 32:9-10). But Moses interceded for the people, and so instead of God consuming them, they had to consume their god! Moses had the golden calf ground up into powder, put into water, and had the people of Israel drink it (Ex 32:20). For the anger and vengeance of God was upon the people.

But tonight we remember the beginning of a **new covenant**. For we are the stiff-necked people. We are the violators of God's Word. We are the ones who depart from the Word of the Lord and worship gods of our own making. Not golden calves, perhaps, but all kinds of people and things and ideas that become our idols, forbidden images and lusting, fearing, loving, and trusting in what is not the one true God. That's us - who need to repent. That's us - who, like the people of Israel, justly deserve the anger and vengeance of God upon our sin.

But for us, too, the author of Hebrews says, a mediator has stepped in the gap between us and God. Not another Moses, but better - the Son of God Himself. The last and eternal high priest. The last and eternal tabernacle. The last and eternal sacrifice, who would offer up *Himself* and *His* blood - the blood of God - for the sin of the world. To purify us body and soul. That we sinners and rebellious ones have peace and fellowship with God, an eternal redemption, and an eternal inheritance.

And the institution of this new covenant happened when all that happened to Israel in the Exodus and at Mt. Sinai was fresh on the minds of the disciples; that day when they would remember how the Lord brought them out of Egypt and saved them from death: **the Passover**. And Jesus said: *this is my blood of the covenant*. And they were to drink it - the blood of their God! But now not in vengeance, not as punishment. This blood is *poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*. To restore fellowship and communion with God.

But not just that - He also gave them bread to eat and said *this is my body*. Just as Israel ate the manna in the desert to sustain them in their journey, so the new Israel would eat this new bread to sustain us in this life. Just as Israel ate the lamb that had shed its blood in Egypt *for them* to deliver them from death, so the new Israel eats the Lamb of God who shed His blood *for us* to deliver us from death. New food and drink for a new covenant. A new covenant not just to remember the past, although that is part of it. But a new covenant for **here and now**. For the present. That we *here and now* have forgiveness from, and fellowship and communion with, our God. Our God who brought us out of our slavery to sin, passed us through the waters of baptism, and is leading us to the land He has promised us - *a promised eternal inheritance* in heaven.

And there, we will no longer eat and drink the body and blood of God, of Jesus, as we do here and now. There in eternal peace and rest, we will be as Moses and the others on the top of Mt. Sinai: *we will behold God, and eat and drink with Him* in His feast that will have no end.

That is the other part of this meal that we remember and rejoice in tonight. It is a remembrance of the past, and it is a reality for us here and now. But it is also an anticipation of the future - of that feast we are waiting for and are looking forward to in heaven. That time when, as Jesus said, ***I will drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.***

And so truly, this meal bridges the gap of the centuries, between Jesus' earthly life and the day of His return. It unites us with Christians of all times and places who passed through the waters of baptism with us, and eat and drink this meal with us. But most importantly, it unites us to Christ, for the very same body and blood that hung on the cross is the body and blood now given to us, *only with this one difference*: it is not a dead body and blood, no carcass or lifeless golden calf - but the real *resurrected* body and blood of Jesus. His living and glorified body - once dead on the cross, once laid in the tomb, but now living and giving to us the life that we need. Life in the forgiveness of our sins now, and the promise of a life that will never end.

That is the miracle, the mystery that we ponder this night. And even better, *receive*. That on the night when He was betrayed, Jesus took bread and took wine, and when He had given thanks, gave us ***the new covenant*** in His body and blood. To make us one with Him who made Himself one with us. That eating and drinking this bread and wine, this body and blood in faith, we say now: ***It is I!*** I, not the sinner or betrayer, but I, child of God. I, the forgiven. Because of You - *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.