

2 April 2026
Holy Maundy Thursday

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“The End Is the Beginning”

Text: Matthew 26:17-30; Exodus 24:3-11; Hebrews 9:11-22

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

It was the Passover. A special night. A joyous night. This was the night they came out of Egypt. Not just their fathers. They, too, though yet unborn, came out. That's what they said. For that's what this meal did - they didn't just remember the past; they were joined to it. By participating in this meal, they participated in that first passover. They became a part of it. Time and space are no obstacle for God. This is the night God brought **US** out of Egypt.

They would re-tell the story. The hundreds of years of slavery. The oppression. And then the mighty hand of God that brought them out. Ten plagues, each one worse than the one before. God judging the gods of Egypt and striking them down. All of them. Until one, final, decisive blow. The death of all the firstborn males in Egypt. Of man and beast. All *except* the ones protected by the blood. The blood of the lamb. The blood poured out and then smeared on the doorframes of their houses. God made a promise - that death would pass over the houses of all marked with the blood of the lamb. And it did! And now they would go out. Free.

And ever since that night, Israel remembered and celebrated *their* Passover. For over a thousand of years. On this same night, every year. It was a special night. A joyous night.

Which is why *this* night was so unusual. For Jesus spoke not in joy, but of betrayal - and one of them! His friends. But then, this too: that after all this time and so many celebrations, *that this would be the last time for Him. **I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*** What they didn't know is that this would also be the last time *they* would eat the passover. Because now, a new passover was taking place. A new rescue from slavery. A new deliverance from death. With a new Lamb. So this last passover was also the first. The end was the beginning. So as they ate the old for one final time, they were also eating the new for the first time. New flesh and new blood.

Maybe it even felt eerily like that first passover. Those families in Egypt, cloistered

in their houses, and they with Jesus in an upper room. Romans soldiers replaced Egyptian ones, all around them. The opposition and scheming of the Jewish leaders against Jesus increasing, just as the Egyptian taskmasters were coming down on their fathers with increasing severity. This was a Passover unlike any other. More than they knew!

For then Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." The new flesh of the new Lamb.

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant."

Blood, not to smear on doorframes, but to drink. Blood for their bodies that housed them. Blood that would protect them from death, because this blood ***is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins***. And if the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), then the forgiveness of sins is life. And not just for them - ***for many***, Jesus said. Which is a weird kind of Hebraism. For if Jesus had said *all* instead of *many*, for us, in English, that would have meant the biggest, everyone, all people. But for them, thinking like the Hebrews they were, it would simply have meant all of them gathered there, in that room. A smaller group. *Only*. So by saying ***many***, Jesus is actually saying the opposite of what we think; He is saying the big word - that this blood was for more than just them, but for all people. This blood is for the forgiveness of all, from that time forth.

But there's something else, too, in what Jesus said there . . . ***this is my blood of the covenant***. That phrase, ***the blood of the covenant***, had been used only one time before, and you heard it tonight: *at Mount Sinai*. This, too, was part of the Passover story. That after coming out of Egypt, the people arrived at Mount Sinai, the memory of all that had taken place still fresh in their minds. And God made a covenant with them. *I will be your God, and you will be My people*. And the people said YES! And then half ***the blood of the covenant*** was thrown on the altar, and half was thrown on the people. And then, as we heard, the covenant was sealed with a meal. Moses and Aaron, Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel saw God, and ate and drank.

So to use that same phrase here - ***the blood of the covenant*** - meant something. Actually it wasn't exactly the same phrase - Jesus altered it, just a little. For He said, ***this is MY blood of the covenant***. A new covenant. Because for *this* covenant, the blood of goats and bulls would not do. To purify the conscience, to purify the soul, only the blood of the Lamb of God would do. Blood not on the outside of our houses, but the inside of our bodies.

This is MY blood, Jesus said. Poured out. In mere hours. And with that, a new exodus would take place, from a new covenant, with a new freedom. Not from slavery, but from sin and death.

And of this covenant, you are invited to eat. You are in the ***many***. For the blood of the Lamb has been not thrown, but poured on you in Holy Baptism, and now the flesh and blood of the Lamb is given to you here in this meal. You ***eat and drink with God***, at His Table. At this new Passover, first celebrated that night, and ever since.

And just as with that first Passover, you are not just remembering here an event that took place a long, long time ago, in a land far, far away. With this meal you don't just remember the past, *but are joined to it*. Time and space are no obstacle to God. By participating in this Passover, you participate in Jesus' Passover. You become a part of it. *In Jesus* by virtue of your Baptism, and *with Jesus'* body and blood in you, you become a part of Jesus' Passover. Passing through death to life. His victory, your victory.

And you have! You are even now living a new life. Not an Egypt life, a slavery life, a captive-to-sin life, but a life that will never end. You will die, but your life will not end. The end is the beginning. The end of this life, the beginning of the next.

Now, the disciples struggled with this a bit. Ends and beginning are tough. They fell asleep, ran away, denied, were frightened, and hid. Maybe you, too. The Pharaohs, the Romans, the enemies of Christ are still out there. And our sinful flesh is still in here. So we struggle to live in the freedom we have.

But as time and space are not obstacles to God, neither is your sin and death. Jesus took care of those for you in His Passover. Your sin is forgiven and your death is defeated for you have pass-overed with Him.

We heard tonight that ***without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins***. But that means that *with* the shedding of blood there is forgiveness. The blood of Jesus. The blood of the Lamb. The blood of God. What sin do you have that the blood of God cannot cleanse? If the answer to that question is none - and it is! - then you are free. Free from the Egypt of your slavery. Free from your sins. Free to live as the child of God you are. For He is not just your God, but your Father. And you are not just His people, but His son.

And that makes this a special night for us. A joyous night. Though a night that begins our solemn remembrance of Jesus' death on the cross. We will strip the altar. The music will go away. The lights will dim. But though solemn, we are not somber.

Neither do we mourn. Because we know this is the Passover of our Lord, and with this meal, *our* Passover. We know how this story ends. In victory.

Which makes this a special night - a special *three nights* for us, actually. To repent, reflect, and remember. And to get ready for the joy that is coming. The joy of Easter, *and* the joy of our *eternal* Easter.

So come, eat your Passover. Jesus has prepared it. For you.

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