

2014_03_26 Midweek Passion 4
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

The Blood of Christ in the Book of Hebrews:
4 – THE BLOOD THAT PROTECTS
Hebrews 11:28
INI

Grace to you from Him who is our Great High Priest, who mediates a New Covenant in His own blood, and peace to you in His blood, a blood which cleanses us from all sin (Hebrews 1:1-2) Amen.

The fourth in our series of texts dealing with the blood of Christ in the book of Hebrews is just one verse in chapter 11. Chapter 11 of Hebrews is all about faith. The writer demonstrate that the believer is delivered from trial and even death by faith in the promises of God. And he demonstrates this point in a series of examples: from Abel to Abraham, from Joseph to Moses; he brings to mind “the great cloud of witnesses that surrounds us;” that have gone before us; that have rested upon God’s promises. We pick up with tonight’s text, verse 28, with the example of Moses and Old Testament Israel:

Hebrews 11:28

²⁸ By faith [Moses] kept the Passover and the sprinkling [spreading] of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

This is the word of the Lord.

In Jesus name, who is the beginning and end of our faith, dear fellow believers in Him,

Where do you feel safe? And where might you not feel so safe?

I’ve driven through down town Chicago several times. And there are certain neighborhoods where a person just doesn’t feel safe. I recall driving through Chicago with my parents as a child. I remember being told to lock my door (before power locks) and roll up my window and we were just at a stop light. Even with my doors locked, there was an uneasy feeling. We were far from home, in a strange place. And being away from home can make a person feel unprotected.

Home is generally a safe place to be. It is the one place where we should feel most comfortable. It is the place where we can lock out those we don't want, and protect what is nearest and dearest to us. Your family lives there; the people we love and trust.

All the while, outside there is something threatening; a danger which is lurking about. Outside are dreadful evils: the destroyer is visiting the world and why should we be spared? And each day we seek refuge, safety, protection from that which we fear. Can we simply roll up our windows and lock our doors? Where will we find protection?

Home is where the Israelites were to find safety that dreadful night. They were to be at home, with their families, surrounded by God's promise. They were safe inside their homes, because that was where the blood offered protection. In the home where God's Word was present, there was safety; through the blood of the lamb protection was provided.

Yet all the while, there was something threatening outside, a dreadful thing; Pharaoh has hardened his heart again and again; he withstood the LORD's command and had driven the Almighty to enact this dreadful last plague. The destroyer will be released in Egypt this night and he will take the first born of every family. Even their own homes, locked doors could not keep out God's judgment.

But what will keep God's people safe? They too would gather in their homes this night. And why should they be spared? For the Israelites, God commands a divine memorial; It wasn't because their doors were locked, but because their doors were stained with blood. The Israelites were instructed to mark their doors with the blood of a lamb. "The destroyer" was passing through Egypt and he would spare only those doorposts which show the blood of the lamb. It is called "the LORD's Passover" because this evening the LORD will "pass over" the houses of all who heed His word and trust in His promise.

Home is where they gather this dreadful night. At home, with family, surrounded by God's promises.

It is left to the father to lead, to pray, and to teach. It is the father who selects the lamb. He goes to the shepherds market and seeks the best of the flock; this lamb must have no blemish or defect. As evening draws near, he and his son slaughter the lamb, and so mark the beginning of the Passover. They are careful to collect the blood, for they know that God has sanctified this blood for special use. Without the blood, their worship is unacceptable and their family would be under God's judgment together with the Egyptians. They collect the blood and use a bundle of hyssop branches to slosh it on the

doorposts of their house. The lamb is the central figure and its blood is the most significant element in the feast.

The family gathers for meal and prayer. The ceremony is the meal. They share in eating the roasted lamb as a gift of God's mercy. And even as the family enjoys the fellowship and food, there is a sense of apprehension – an urgency in the air; for they know that tonight, a something dreadful is taking place.

The father instructs them to eat with haste. They fasten their belts, they tie their sandals and the father even holds his staff in hand. It is left to the father to teach what this means. God has directed each father to recount this as a everlasting memorial to his children: "It is the Passover of the LORD; for He is passing over the houses of the children of Israel and saving us who trust in His promise" (Exodus 12).

It is just outside the door; just outside, the destroyer has been released. Oh, that Pharaoh would be humbled. Oh, that he would listen to Moses and let God's people go. Together, they eat and drink in the midst of God's merciful presence. God has provided the blood that protects.

Why should they be spared? Notice how the event of Exodus 12 was equally threatening to the Israelites as it was to the Egyptians. The difference in who was spared and who was not had nothing to do with the people. God's people were no better than the Egyptians. They were not protected by locked doors. It wasn't their merit or careful planning or strength that would guard them against what was outside.

28 By faith [Moses] kept the Passover and the sprinkling [spreading] of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

What saved them from punishment was not anything that they did at all. It has to do with trust. Trust in God's promise of protection. God had promised that the blood of the lamb was the means by which they would receive His mercy. It was sacramental blood – a means of grace; it was God's means to share forgiveness and salvation. By partaking in this sacred meal, the people were expressing their faith in God's promise and salvation. The difference between the Egyptians and the Israelites had nothing to do with works, it is all about faith.

It is that same Word of the Lord which enacts protection for us too. In our homes, in our hearts – the command of the Lord has enacted protection for each of you. The Passover was always a shadow – a promise of true protection which was to come. The

protection that matters most of all to God is for our hearts. The Passover always pointed to Christ and the greater covenant which would be forged in His blood.

As the Apostle Paul reiterates in his epistle: "Christ, our Passover Lamb, was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

There He was, the night of His betrayal, keeping the Passover. There He was, gathered with family, acting as father; he was the host: gathered with His disciples surrounded by His promise. This would be home to them; the place of utmost safety, where they recline together with Jesus. They break bread, they drink wine. And their Lord provided eternal protection in His own blood.

Luke 22:17–20 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.

"A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth, the guilt of all men bearing" (TLH 142:1). Those words of Paul Gerhardt rightly picture what lay ahead for our Lord. That spotless lamb went forth. He knew what lay outside those doors that night. It was the night of betrayal, the hour of darkness. Outside is something dreadful. Outside of that upper room the destroyer was released and death was seeking the first born of God. Uncomplaining and faithful unto death, Jesus goes forth. When the destroyer calls for Him, He does not hide or run, but steps forward: "I am He."

"And laden with the sins of earth, None else the burden sharing! Goes patient on, grows weak and faint, To slaughter led without complaint, That spotless life to offer, Bears shame, and stripes, and wounds and death, Anguish and mockery and saith, "willing all this I suffer." (TLH 142:1)

In that upper room the cries of John the Baptist echo: *John 1:29 "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*

The same cry echoes here, in this room. Every communion Sunday we gather around those words: "Oh Christ, Thou Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Have mercy upon us." As disciples, we keep the feast of Passover in its fullest sense. Shadow has become substance. And the blood we receive is the blood of the New Covenant, replacing what has passed away with something greater. This is not a yearly memorial of deliverance; this is an eternal memorial of deliverance. This is not the carcass of a dead lamb that we share; this is the body and blood of a Lamb who has

risen and stands victorious. And this is protection not just for our houses; this blood stains our heart.

All the while, outside there is something that threatens us. Outside danger lurks. But it is not just outside. Very often this evil strikes much closer to home. It gets into our homes, into our hearts, and threatens our faith and family. The destroyer is visiting the world and together with the world we experience the judgment. Can we simply roll up our windows and lock our doors? Where will we find refuge, safety, protection from that which we fear?

By faith Moses kept the Passover. By faith the disciples kept the Passover. By faith we keep the Passover. It is not by locked doors that we escape what is out there. We cannot escape the curse of sin by our works or careful planning or our strength. The locked doors of our life cannot keep out the destroyer.

Instead, we are spared because our hearts have been stained with the blood of Christ. Our Father is here present, leading us, blessing us. His promises surround us with Christ and we find protection from the destroyer. By His substitutionary atonement, the Lord passes over us and rescues and spares us. He gathers us here, behind closed doors, with family, surrounded by promises.

We eat this meal with a sense of haste. There is an urgency which calls to us; a world which is perishing and trying to drag us out into the streets. As Christians we return to a world which does not spare us from great loss or pain. The world is dark and death is at the door. It is a time for Christians to have their belts fastened, their shoes tied, ready for pilgrimage. With every greater urgency we gather to receive Christ's body and blood. Here, a place we can call home, with family, surrounded by God's promises. Week after week, as a family of faith we receive deliverance. We share in the feast of victory, the resurrected Lamb to strengthen and protect us in true faith until life everlasting.

So whether you are threatened by something out there in the big city, or a little closer to home; this is the blood that will protect you. We receive it here in communion and take it into our homes and families and callings. As we leave, we leave with Christ in us – protecting us from any evil that would threaten our soul; from any destruction that would destroy our salvation, and from any death that would rob us of life. His blood protects us.

And so we sing:

*Of death I am no more afraid,
New life from Thee is flowing;
Thy cross affords me cooling shade
When noonday's sun is glowing.
When by my grief I am opprest,
On Thee my weary soul shall rest
Serenely as on pillows.
Thou art my Anchor when by woe
My bark is driven to and fro
On trouble's surging billows.*

Amen.