

When the families of Israel gathered for the first Passover meal, they licked their chops over a roasted, herb-flavored, spring lamb, soaking up its juices with fresh-baked bread. It must have tasted great. But there was more to that meal than the food on the table. These people were slaves in exile. Pharaoh refused to let them go home. God sent plagues: poisoned water, frogs, flies, cattle disease, boils, hail, locusts and darkness. But Pharaoh would not let the people go. Finally God unleashed the worst plague: the death of the firstborn of every enemy family and of all their animals. God preserved the Israelites from this tragedy if they performed a simple ritual. Each family slaughtered a lamb for the evening meal and smeared its blood on the front door of their home. The angel of death passed over those houses.

The first Passover meal came with instructions. If your family was small you shared with your neighbor. If you didn't have sheep, you could use a goat. If you didn't want to slaughter a good animal, too bad: you weren't supposed to cheat God. You also had to dress ready to go, and eat with your walking staff in one hand as if you were anxious to leave. Imagine eating with the car keys in one hand. They were ready to be free.

They were so anxious to leave, they ate unleavened bread. Death was coming; and when Pharaoh told the Israelites to get out, they had to go before he changed his mind. They didn't wait around for the yeast to rise so they could eat nice fluffy buns. They ate the hardtack of people on the move.

There was more to this meal than the food on the table. They ate this meal as slaves. They ate this meal next door to death. They ate this meal with a mission to praise God in their own land.

There is more to our meals than the food on the table. We eat as families connected in happiness and sorrow. We eat what farmers grew in poverty and what we labored to afford. We eat to gain strength for the work we do.

The meal we share here tonight isn't much: a bit of bread, a sip of wine. But there is more to this meal. We eat the body of Christ and drink his blood because we are slaves to sin. We are surrounded by the hatred of murder and the sorrow of lives lost. God has given us a mission to tell of miracles beyond imagination.

This is the meal of people who believe that this life is a shadow and the best is yet to come. This is the meal of people who believe that we cannot please God without pleasing our neighbor. We believe in God, we believe in sacrifice, and we believe in love.

As we share this eucharist tonight, let us remember that the gift of freedom is more than any one nation can win for another. Freedom comes from faith that no danger can harm us when the blood of Christ is within us.