



Sermon

Sunday, January 20, 2019

Charleston, SC

10:30 am Chapel & 6 :00 pm Sermon ~ Exodus 12:1-14, John 13:1-17

Why the Red Door

The Rev. Al Zadig, Jr.

One of my favorite July summer memories as a boy was when our whole family would leave our home in Boston and visit my Grandfather Zadig, who lived in New York City.

There we were in the big family wagon, all seven children riding into Manhattan. Once there, we would all change into little navy blazers and ties for the boys, and dresses for the girls. And in a scene out of that classic book, *Make way for Ducklings*, we too in single file would walk into the lobby of my Grandfather's apartment building. And all the folks in the lobby would stare as we would then pile into the elevator, And pour into my Grandfather's 10th floor apartment. Now, it's funny what you notice as a child. As was our custom, when we were saying our goodbyes, My Grandfather would always walk us to the elevator, kiss us all goodbye, and then, while we waited for the door to open, he would go back into his apartment. But after one particular visit, after he walked back to his apartment, he surprised us all. He makes a u-turn, comes back, kisses us all one more time, and then gives unexpected hugs - unexpected because he wasn't a hugger. As a child, I remember thinking, "That was so special!" Weeks later, at the age of 93, he would die from a routine surgery.

My grandfather was the most wonderful, gentle man. But as a Jew who witnessed the atrocities of the Holocaust and came to America, he abandoned God and all hope in the after life. That ancient question, "How could a loving God allow such atrocities?" led to deep pain for him. He couldn't forgive God, an unforgiveness which led to a death inside for him, which secondly, led to no belief in the afterlife. My grandfather would have agreed with Ernest Hemingway who, in his 1929 novel *A Farewell to Arms*, writes, "life is a short journey from nothing-ness to

nothing-ness. Man's destiny in the universe is like a colony of ants on a burning log."

Despite the riches of a Manhattan life, there was a serene sadness about him. This gentleman with a sweet soul could never overcome the two faces of death: unforgiveness and eternal hopelessness.

This morning I want to talk to you about these two faces of death, that earthly death that comes as a result of unforgiveness in any direction, and eternal death. Regarding the first, we all know people who are alive, yet are the living dead because they've not been able to forgive. That inability to forgive or be forgiven results in death for the living. It was George Herbert who said, "He who can't forgive destroys the bridge over which he himself must pass." This inability to forgive or be forgiven results in a felt death in our soul. The second death, dying with no belief in God, is one that lasts for eternity. One recent poll finds that 54 million Americans believe there is no life after death.

With these two faces of death in mind, let me take you into the book of Exodus. For one of the most violent nights recorded in scripture, and the night these two faces of Death Are defeated. Here's the back story to exodus 12. For 430 years, the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt. Life was painfully difficult to the point that even God had had enough. So God chooses to deliver his people from the pharaoh and calls Moses to lead the people out of Egypt and slavery. That calling of Moses happened at the burning bush which we talked about last week. Yes, we all remember Charlton Heston and his famous four words to Pharaoh, "Let my people go!" And those nine plagues of blood, frogs, gnats, flies, cow death, boils, hail, locusts, and total darkness. Nothing works. Pharaoh's heart remains hardened.

Enter the tenth plague, the angel of death. To free the Jews, God would send an angel of death to kill every firstborn son in Egypt. All sons, except Jewish sons, that is. And to prepare the Jews for this most painful night, God gives detailed instructions in exodus 12. Each Jewish family is to take a lamb and inspect it from head to toe to make sure it is perfect. Then the lamb would be slaughtered, and the blood poured into a bowl. Then the lifeless lamb, would be roasted. The father in each home would take that bowl of lamb's blood and paint their door-frame with it. The Jews obey. Here's how I imagine it played out. After painting the door frame of their homes with lamb's blood, the Jewish fathers would look at their calloused, blistered hands from all their slave labor. With tears in their eyes and cries with joy, they would shout, "I will not be a slave after tonight! Tonight, death will be defeated!" All are in bed, when the angel of death begins to fly. Suddenly, terrifying shrieks and cries from the city begin. Deep wailing, from every corner. Jewish fathers gather their children saying, "The angel of death is flying all around us. Be calm. The blood will save us. The blood will save us."

The angel of death flies through Egypt and spares only homes with red, blood-soaked doors. Pharaoh's son dies. Every first-born son in Pharaoh's cabinet dies. All without the blood, die. From the richest and most educated, to the poorest and most impoverished, an estimated 200,000 sons die. Only the blood could save the people. The angel of death, in seeing the blood of the lamb over the door frames, passes-over the homes of the Jews, and they are saved. Death passes-over. Death is defeated! The blood prevents the destroyer from entering. And as death is defeated, freedom ensues! Over

600,000 Jews make their exodus from Egypt towards the promised land.

This pass-over of death, the holy day of Passover, more than any other event in history would create the identity of the Jewish people. The lamb brought the Jews redemption that night. Redemption, meaning to buy back. Let me cut right to the chase. Jesus is that new lamb, whose blood shed on that cross is our pass-over of death. The blood of Jesus has bought us back.

1 Corinthians 5:7: *“Christ our pass-over lamb has been sacrificed for us, Therefore let us keep the feast of pass-over!”* Sound familiar? Jesus Christ our pass-over. Yes, the blood Jesus sheds on the cross will not permit the angel of death to enter the house of our heart. Which is why so many churches have red doors, to proclaim, “Enter here all that want to live eternally.”

Consider these amazing points about the lamb of the Passover and Jesus the lamb of God over our pass-over. God says to Moses, “The lambs you choose must be perfect, without blemish.” Consider Jesus: perfect, sinless. Born of the Virgin Mary through the Holy spirit without blemish.

The sacrifice of Jesus the new lamb on the cross redeems our two faces of death. First, defeating the death of unforgiveness. Ephesians 1:7: *In Jesus we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.* Second, defeating eternal death. John 6:54: *Jesus saying “whoever eats my flesh, and drinks my blood has eternal life.”* In the words of J.I. Packer, they who put personal faith in Jesus will never die. This is why we have confession and repentance followed by receiving the blood of Christ in communion every Sunday, that Death, through forgiveness, would be defeated. And eternal death, through repentance and belief, would be defeated. John 6: *“unless you drink the blood of Jesus, you have no life in you!”* Without the blood of the lamb, Jesus, we will be letting in the destroyer, Translating into a life of guilt, shame and hopelessness.

Let me make it personal. In my own life, sometimes being with family can trigger old unresolved bitterness, regrets, and unforgiveness. It’s in these times I have to remember that the pass-over is for me. That because of the blood of Jesus and through his Holy

Spirit, more than by my ability, I can forgive that member of the family that’s difficult. Because of the blood and through the Holy spirit, I can be forgiven and I can forgive those who have hurt me.

But like my grandfather, what do you do when a family member or a beloved friend just doesn’t believe? After all, you can’t sneak to the door of their heart and paint it red! I remember some years ago being at an extended family gathering in Philadelphia. My son Hudson was talking to a cousin. As seven year olds, They were talking about God when one of the cousins say, “No one really believes God created everything you know.” Hudson covers his ears, looks at the cousin and replies, “I’m going to pretend I didn’t just hear that.”

What do you do with loved ones who desire no blood on their doorframes? I’ve learned you can’t genetically engineer faith. Yet it should drive us to our knees, praying, “Lord, through your Holy Spirit give them a hunger to receive you, and help me, even imperfectly, model what it looks like to bear your blood. Through your Holy Spirit help me be most forgiving, most forgivable, and help me reflect the power of what your blood has done!”

At the end of the day for Moses, the pass-over leads to freedom, a freedom leading to the promised land. At the end of the day for us, the pass-over leads to the freedom of forgiveness, a freedom that leads to the promised land of eternity!

I think of one of the most prolific hymn writers in history, a woman named Frances van Alstyne, Fanny Crosby. She would write 8,000 hymns at the turn of the 19th century. The amazing thing about Mrs Crosby is that she was blind. One particular Sunday a child comes up to her and says very simply, “Mrs. Crosby, don’t you wish you could see?” Mrs. Crosby stops in her tracks, brings the child close to her and says, “Son, my first request at birth would have been that god would remove my sight, because when I get to heaven, the first sight I will see will be that of my savior’s face!” There is power in the blood!

I know we all know this, but my friends, if we know it in our soul and mind, the question is, doesn’t this news cause us to love Jesus even more? He’s done the heavy lifting!

He’s won the battle! He’s on our side for all eternity! We don’t have to hold on to fellow believers when they approach their earthly passing. The blood of Jesus means we will see them again! But also, doesn’t this news cause us to want to run out and tell the world we have the cure for the two faces of death? Yes with joy proclaiming from the housetops, forgiveness and repentance leads to freedom, and “life doesn’t have to end with this one?”

This freedom is why we celebrate Sanctity of Life Sunday! The blood of Jesus shed is for all, for those in the womb to the eldest among us. Yes, because of Jesus, every life is sacred! It’s why Martin Luther King preached what he did, the blood of Jesus is for all! The unborn. Black, white, old, young. It’s also why we launch the Global Impact Celebration in three weeks, mobilizing to tell the world we have the cure for death! The blood of Jesus continues to drive our need to bring this message beyond the four corners of law.

Two final thoughts. Sir Arthur Conan-Doyle, in his book *The Great Boer War*, recounts the story of a small group of British soldiers surprised by an enemy attack. The British fall back under heavy fire and realize the only way their wounded would be able to survive is to bring them under a banner, so they would know where to go for medical help. Yet all they have is a white sheet with nothing to write with. So they use blood from their wounds to make a large cross on the cloth. They hoist this blood soaked sheet and wouldn’t you know it, their attackers respect that bloodied banner with a cross. The wounded British would live. Death defeated. There is power in the blood of Christ.

But finally, Back to my Grandfather. With all my heart I pray that from his deathbed, my kind and gentle grandfather looked up, saw Jesus and said, “It’s you, the one I’ve been searching for all my life!” I pray I will see him in heaven. Yet we know from scripture, our sweet spirit isn’t enough to save us. Our kindness, gentleness, and good deeds can’t save us. Only the blood. What about you?

My friends, painting the door frames of our heart with the blood of Christ simply means praying, “I receive you Lord. Forgive my sins, and through your Holy spirit help me forgive others. Live in me as my king.” That I too, would see you face to face.