

Thursday, April 9, 2020 – Maundy Thursday
“Access!”

Exodus 24: 1-11

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Adapted from R. Reed Lessing's "Let My People Go!"

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

Imagine a person walking in front of the White House seeking access to the president of the United States. Better yet, imagine that person is you. There you are, in fine form. Your shoes are shined, your hair is combed and you are dressed in your Sunday best. You want an audience with the Commander in Chief because there are some burning issues you want to take up with him.

First, you've got some thoughts about the COVID 19 response you'd like to share. Then there is the problem of a new highway. It doesn't have an exit ramp close enough to your home. And then there's the issue of income taxes. They're too high for you and too low for everybody else. Finally, there is that sticky matter called student loans. Couldn't the president make a few phone calls and get you off the hook?

Let's be honest, though. There are far too many barriers between you and the president. The gates are locked. The guards won't let you in. And the Secret Service has orders to shoot first and ask questions later... but what if the president looks out his window on Pennsylvania Avenue and sees you? What if he gives the command and his security detail escorts you right into the Oval Office? And what if the president attentively listens and makes all the changes you ask for? Too good to be true? Right? With the President of the United States, yes. With the King of the Universe, you have a friend in high places.

Today is Maundy Thursday and in our sermon series on the book of Exodus we come to Exodus 24. It starts, "Then he said to Moses, 'Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar.'" "Worship from afar."

“Don’t get too close!” Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel don’t have access. There are far too many barriers between them and the LORD.

Yahweh, the LORD, is the holy, infinite, eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing and only God. Yahweh is in a league all his own. Sure, Yahweh has descended upon Mt. Sinai in a cloud and in glory, but Israel’s leaders must still “worship from afar.” Why is that?

The Bible says that we are born dead in transgressions and sins. The Bible says that by nature we are God’s enemies. The Bible says we are fading leaves, empty cisterns, and flowers quickly fading. The Bible says that we are rebels, prodigals, prone to wander, hard-hearted, selfish, and lost in sin: “Moses alone shall come near to the LORD, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him” (Ex 24:2). Why does Moses get to come near? Moses gets to come near because Moses is the mediator, the go-between, between God and Israel. Moses is going to bridge the gap between Israel’s leaders and God. How so?

“Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words’” (Ex 24:8). Blood is how Israelites get out of Egypt. The Passover lamb is slain and his blood is splattered on the doorframes of the houses. The angel of death passes over Israelite houses but passes through the houses of the Egyptians and strikes down every firstborn in Egypt.

Blood is how Israelites get out of Egypt. Blood is how Israelites gain access to God. Blood is all we need! Listen to this: “Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel. They saw God, and ate and drank” (Ex 24:9–11). These Israelites not only see the God of Israel, they eat and drink in his presence! Talk about access!

And this is God’s gift to you! Blood is how we get out of Egypt. Egypt—our house of guilt and remorse and darkness and death. Blood is also how we gain access to God. Blood is all we

need! Whose blood? Christ's blood. Calvary isn't a sudden tragedy. Christ's execution isn't God's knee-jerk reaction to a world spinning out of control. No. Revelation 13:8 states, "The Lamb was slain from the creation of the world." Before the world was made, the Father planned for his Son's blood to be shed.

On Good Friday the Jews wanted Barabbas. Herod wanted a show. Pilate wanted out. Caiaphas wanted death. The soldiers just wanted to have some fun. And the executioners? All they wanted was Jesus's blood. Their strategy was singular; beat him within an inch of death and then stop. With his back lacerated by lashes they shove the crossbeam on his shoulders. When he comes to Calvary there they nail him to the wood. And there he hangs. "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

All is not right with the world because God is in his heaven. No, all is right with the world because God is on the cross. All is right with the world because God is on the cross. Hebrews 10:19 says, "Therefore, brothers, we have confidence [confidence!] to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus." By the blood of Jesus, we have access! Access to the Most Holy Place. Access to the throne of Almighty God. Access to the heart of him who rules the sun, the moon, and the stars. Access to our Father who wields a full monopoly of power in heaven and on earth, for us, his children!

By the blood of Jesus we enter God's presence with confidence! Not with shaking and trembling. Not with angst and fear. We enter with confidence! The word "confidence" appears forty times in the New Testament. Why is that? The message of the New Testament is singular. By the blood of Jesus we have unlimited access to the Most Holy Place of the Most Holy God who has the Most Holy name!

That's confidence! Confidence to live; confidence to speak; confidence when we suffer; confidence when we pray; and even confidence when we die.

Unlimited access. This is God's gift to Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel. They see the God of Israel and they eat and drink.

I'll be honest with you – I struggled immensely with my preparation for preaching for Maundy Thursday, more than any others since the COVID crisis began. How do you preach Maundy Thursday without the blood of Jesus that gives us access? Are you feeling left out, left alone, without access to the most powerful person in the universe? The table where we have access to God, we see God when we eat and drink the true body and true blood of Jesus? I miss it too. It grieves me the position that we're in today... were that all that God had done to provide us access, surely we'd throw caution to the wind. I long, as I know you do, to gather physically around this altar again.

But remember too that the blood of Jesus has given you unlimited access, and He shares that access through your baptism, too. Those waters, long since dried continue to course through your spirit washing you, drowning your sin, resurrecting you every day. So too the Word of God, Law and Gospel read and preached into your ears, forgiving your sins by the very proclamation of the statement, "I forgive you all your sins," not a reminder but a reality. Access is yours! Imagine that! Unlimited access. It's God's gift in Christ, at this table, for you, and as important as it is, not only here – it is yours, today! In Jesus' name, amen.