

*Exodus 12:24–28 (NIV84)*

<sup>24</sup> “Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. <sup>25</sup> When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. <sup>26</sup> And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ <sup>27</sup> then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’ ” Then the people bowed down and worshiped. <sup>28</sup> The Israelites did just what the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron.

*Exodus 12:24–28 (ESV)*

<sup>24</sup> You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. <sup>25</sup> And when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. <sup>26</sup> And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ <sup>27</sup> you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.’ ” And the people bowed their heads and worshiped. <sup>28</sup> Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

### What does this Mean to You?

When Jewish families celebrate the Passover, they usually follow a tradition that springs from the word of God we just read. They read a booklet called a *Haggadah* – which is Hebrew for “the telling.” They read the story of the Passover. Now there are many different versions of the Haggadah out there. But most of them incorporate the idea of children asking questions, because God said that their children would ask what their Passover celebration meant and they were supposed to explain it. In one Christianized version – intended to be used by believers so that we can see Christ in the Passover – one child asks, ‘What does this mean?’ After an answer is given, another child asks, “What does this mean *to you*?” That question gives the parent the opportunity to explain God’s love for us in Christ to his or her own child. God intended the Passover to be celebrated that way because there is no better place to provide Christian education than in the home. So when we stop and think about these words from Exodus, two and half thousand years after God gave them to Moses, we do well to ask that question: **what does this mean to you?**

#### I.

Now, obviously, we aren’t Old Testament believers and most of us have never taken part in a Passover celebration. But behind every Old Testament rule and ritual there is a New Testament truth. That’s definitely the case here. **What does this mean to you? An opportunity to share God’s grace.**

The Passover is all about God’s grace. The verses we have before us focus on one part of that grace: the telling. In that telling we find New Testament truth. You see, God specifically commanded that the Passover be celebrated in the home. Three times a year, God commanded that every male in Israel was supposed to go to the temple in Jerusalem and celebrate a major festival. But the Passover was not one of those three pilgrim feasts, even though many Jews since ancient times have gone to Jerusalem to celebrate it. God commanded that families gather to celebrate. If the family was too small for the feast, they were to gather with neighbors or relatives, but this, the greatest of all Old Testament festivals, was designed for the home.

God commanded every family to select a lamb and to care for it for four days in their homes. Then, at twilight, they were to slaughter that lamb and roast it whole. They were to eat it with bitter herbs and bread without yeast. Over the thousands of years since the first Passover, many rituals have grown up around this meal. All of them make the night special and different. The questions that Jewish children ask all revolve around the central question, “What makes this night different?” God set up this celebration to raise those questions.

Who did he appoint to answer them? Parents – specifically fathers. The Passover was the key to understanding the work of Jesus. God expected parents to teach their children what it meant. Now, that does not mean that there’s no role for pastors or teachers. But it does mean the responsibility begins at home. That really isn’t all that surprising. Who’s responsible for feeding our children? The government? Our employer? No. We, the parents, are. Who’s responsible for loving our children and making sure that they know how to

treat other people? Who's responsible for making sure that our children get an education? We, the parents, are. And in the same way, we are responsible to God for teaching our children about Jesus. That is the New Testament principle that will be true until Jesus comes back.

This week, we're going to open classes for our Lutheran elementary school and for our local area Lutheran high school. Last week, our synodical schools opened. Today, we're going to install a new teacher for our school here at Peace. God called her to that position and we will exhort her to faithfully teach the children that God places under her care. Lutheran schools are wonderful tools and we can and should use them to strengthen the faith of our children. In the same way, Sunday school is going to start two weeks from today and I hope that all of you will send your children to hear and learn about God's love.

But that doesn't mean that you and I are off the hook. And I can tell you from years of experience, it doesn't take long to tell which parents understand that the spiritual training of their children is their responsibility and which parents don't. You can see it and hear it in the way those children do or don't confess their faith. God calls us parents to teach our children about Christ. It's that simple. God calls us to make our homes a place where spiritual questions are natural, a place where our kids know they can talk to us about this stuff. Now, that doesn't mean you have to know the answer to every question they ask. But think what a wonderful lesson it is when you say, "Let's see if we can find the answer," and get out your Bible and your catechism! And there's no shame in saying, "Let's talk to pastor about that on Sunday." Think of the lesson all that teaches about hearing what God says. Think of the example it sets.

Do you do those things? Do you bring your children to hear the word, in church, in Sunday school, and in our Lutheran schools, if that's the best way for your family to pursue it? Do you make your home a place where your kids feel safe asking spiritual questions, a place where you let them know that thinking about God and faith is a good thing? Do you underline the importance of hearing God's word by letting them see you open your Bible, to study, to answer questions, to grow in your faith? Do you let them see you pray? Have you taught them to pray with you?

How do you feel right now, after all those questions? Are you patting yourself on the back because you've done such a good job? Or do you feel something else – a little guilt, maybe? If so, why? Because we're all sinners, none of us can claim that we have perfectly fulfilled our responsibility to teach our children to know their Savior. Even those of us who have tried to be faithful have to admit that our children have not only seen our faith – they've seen our sin, too. They've seen us lose our temper or let our attention wander in church or say things we know we shouldn't. And sadly, far too many of us have given up this responsibility. We figure that's what we're paying the school to do. That's what we pay the pastor to do. We figure we don't have the education, we don't know enough about it and we just haven't got time. All of that is sin. Patting ourselves on the back and puffing ourselves up for how good a job we've done is sin. Neglecting this responsibility or thinking it's somebody else's job is sin. Undermining our message with sinful words and actions, is, of course, sin. All that sin deserves nothing but God's condemnation in hell.

Are you guilty of that sin? If you don't think so, please plug your ears for the next couple of minutes, because you aren't repentant yet. But if you do feel your guilt and feel like hanging your head before God right now, listen very carefully to what I have to say next: Jesus died for you. He paid for our failures to be perfect Christian parents. He paid for all the mixed messages we've sent. He paid for all the times and all the ways we undermined the gospel. He paid for all the times that we failed to teach our children about their Savior. He died and he paid for all our sin. Then he rose and God declares that we are forgiven. He has wiped away our laziness and our excuses and our failures and mixed messages. It's all gone forever. That's the message he wants you to share with your children. That's what this is all about. Even if you haven't done it before, start doing it now!

## II.

God commands us parents to bring our children to Christ. That command can seem like a heavy burden for us sinners, but he entrusts this responsibility to us. His purpose is to build up their faith and ours by making the gospel the center of our home lives. The Lutherans who went before us liked to speak of a "family altar" – not a piece of furniture, but the practice of worshipping and studying God's word together as a family. That's how God designed the Passover celebration. When we come to this command to teach our children, **what does this mean to you? An opportunity to strengthen our children's faith.**

That's what this is all about: building up their faith. That's the connection between our family altar and our church altar – our Sunday morning gatherings – and our school altar – all the ways that we teach the gospel here at Peace Lutheran School and at HVL and MLS and wherever else our kids are studying. How do we build up that faith? There is only one way: through the gospel.

That's why God had the people of Israel review the Passover year after year. God told them what they were supposed to teach their children: **“It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.”** Do you remember the story? The children of Israel were slaves in Egypt. They cried out to God for deliverance and God sent Moses to lead them to the Promised Land – the land we call Israel today. But Pharaoh didn't want to let his slaves go. So God sent Ten Plagues – ten disasters on Egypt. Each time, Pharaoh begged for relief. But when God took away the plague, Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to let God's people go. The last plague was the plague of the firstborn. In a great act of judgment, God sent the Angel of Death to pass over Egypt and to slay the firstborn son of every household. But God delivered Israel. That's where the Passover lamb comes in. God commanded every Israelite family to slay a lamb and to paint the doorposts of their homes with its blood. When the Angel of Death reached their homes and saw the blood, he passed over that house without harming the children inside.

The next morning, the Egyptians drove the Israelites out of their country. There's much more to the story, but the heart of it is God sparing his people in love. God used the blood of a lamb – a year old, male lamb, without any defect – to save his helpless people. That was a picture that God burned into their minds and for 1500 years God had them reenact that sacrifice with the Passover meal. It continued until Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, laid down his life. He celebrated the Passover one last time and then the next day he died.

The Lamb of God set us free. We were all slaves to sin. The Bible calls us that. It means that we are helpless and powerless to live for God. Our hearts belonged to the devil and every one of us was born doomed to die and go to hell. But the Lamb of God died to save us. His blood set us free from hell. His blood set us free from death. Even though we may die, if Jesus doesn't come back first, we will live. Our souls will go to heaven immediately and when Jesus comes back he will raise our bodies and we will live with him forever.

That Good News is the gospel. It's the message God told us to take throughout the world. It's the message that God entrusted to every Christian parent and it's our job to teach that message to our children. That message itself is filled with God's power to enable us to teach it and it changes the hearts of our children. That message is what why we have a Lutheran elementary school. It's why we support HVL and MLS and all the educational institutions of our synod. The most important piece of information ever given to any human being is the message about Jesus, the gospel that he won eternal life for all of us. When you share that message with your children, when you bring them to church and Sunday school and send them to Peace or HVL, when you create a home in which spiritual questions are freely asked and answered, you are building up the faith of your children. You are fulfilling your number one responsibility as a parent.

What does this mean to you? As a Lutheran, I hope that question resonates with you. Luther asked it, in a slightly abbreviated form, again and again in his Catechism. What does this mean? Again and again, he taught us to ask God what he was saying so that we would understand what it means for us and grow in our faith. God commands us to educate our children in the faith. What does this mean to you? It's an opportunity to share God's grace. It's an opportunity to strengthen the faith of our children. Make the most of the opportunity. Amen.