

Sunday, September 10, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church
Bible Study
“What is the Sign?”
Exodus 12:1-14 and Matthew 18:15-20

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, ask participants, “What is your response when someone asks, ‘What are God’s signs?’” [i.e, message from the Bible, listening to God in prayer, some words through friends/family]

Exodus 12:1-14. Context. After receiving his commission from God, Moses returns to Egypt, and together with his brother Aaron makes his case to Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go free: God requires them to worship him on his holy mountain. Pharaoh refuses. There follows a series a contests between Moses and Pharaoh’s wise men, the first nine plagues, by the end of which even Pharaoh’s advisors are convinced that Moses clearly has powers far superior to their own. Pharaoh still refuses to free the Israelites. The tenth, final, and most deadly plague is visited upon Egypt: the death of the firstborn of all people and animals, from Pharaoh on down. In this week’s reading God gives instructions to Moses and Aaron to protect the Hebrews from the angel of death. The instructions given here are rather precise and detailed, and disrupt the drama of the narrative. Scholars generally believe that the form of the Passover celebration given here comes from the period after the Babylonian Exile, rather than from the time of Moses, some seven centuries earlier. Passover becomes for “the whole congregation” a “day of remembrance.” In biblical terms this is not just an occasion for the community to reflect on the deeds of the past, but more importantly, an occasion to recommit themselves to the God who has in turn “remembered” the covenant made with them and now gives them their freedom from slavery. Jesus at his last supper with his disciples reinterprets the Passover event, making himself the paschal sacrifice that saves his followers; and the freedom he gives becomes the freedom from the slavery of sin and death.

Matthew 18:15-20. Context. Matthew 18 is the fourth of the five “discourses” that the evangelist has edited, bringing together in one place Jesus’ sayings, in this case, concerning the life of the Christian community, the church. This week’s reading opens with a description of how serious sins and disputes should be handled in the church, proceeding with deliberation through a series of conversations that seek to bring about resolution and reconciliation. Jesus

explicitly gives the community the authority to act in this way (binding/loosing), concluding with one of his most famous sayings. Matthew is the only evangelist who uses the word “church” and gives any indication of Jesus’ teaching for the community of believers as a whole – likely the result of Matthew standing much closer to the Jewish tradition than the other evangelists.

Read Exodus 12:1-14 and Matthew 18:15-20

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

Read Exodus 12:1-14 and Matthew 18:15-20 again -

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

What is the Passover of the LORD? “For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD” (Exodus 12:12).

What is the sign of the blood on the doorposts? (Exodus 12:13)]

What is the famous Passover meal in the New Testament? [Matthew 26:17–29; Mark 14:12–25; Luke 22:7–38; for the Israelites,

“The blood on the doorframes acting as a sign so that God’s judgment would “pass over” those houses and spare their firstborns.” For Christians, what/who was used as a sacrifice? [Jesus, Lamb of God]

Jesus sacrificed himself to save us and give us new life. Yet, sometimes, Christians do not get along. What are some of Jesus’ suggestions if another church member sins against us? (Matthew 18:15b) and (Matthew 18:16b).]

“It is in our reconciling that we worship God. It is in our worship of God that we are healing brokenness, we are putting people back together with God and with one another.” What might it mean to reconcile with other Christians?

We are the sign.” What might it look like to live as God’s sign for others? What might be one thing you may do this week?

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Gracious and Loving God, teach us to approach conflicts with love and humility. Guide us to address issues directly and privately, seeking reconciliation and restoration. May we listen and speak compassionately, aiming to restore relationships within our community. In your name, we gather, trusting that where two or three are gathered, you are present, and our prayers for healing and unity will be heard. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.