

New Life Episcopal Church
Uniontown, Ohio



The Firstborn Slain – Gustave Dore

A Sermon for the 15th Sunday after Pentecost
September 6, 2026, 2026

Rev Barbara Bond

Proper 18, Year A

Exodus 12:1-14

Prepare for Departure

Today's Old Testament story requires our utmost respect. The story of the Passover is foundational to Jews and also to Christians. The big theological overlay of this story is about deliverance, about liberation from slavery in many forms. Moses was God's agent in freeing the Jews from slavery in Egypt. God is also the mover and shaker in many liberation stories ever since, with other human agents, such as Martin Luther in the 16th century, Martin Luther King Jr. in the 20th. This story never ends, because we humans are in constant need of liberation and rejuvenation, of leaving behind the things that bind us and forging ahead to new life.

This story is required reading at our Easter Vigil, the one service of the year devoted to Christ's passage from death to resurrected life. This story is required reading for Jews every year at the Passover Seder, when a child asks the assembled family, why is this night different from every other? This story should be required reading for all of us, that we never forget God's action in our lives.

Last week, God spoke to Moses out of a burning bush, told Moses the plan of liberation, and sent him off to Egypt, promising to be with Moses for the many ordeals ahead. Moses asked the Egyptian ruler Pharaoh to let the Jewish people go. Famously from our American history, the enslaved peoples of our past gave themselves courage by singing the spiritual "Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land, tell old Pharaoh to let my people go."

Moses was the agent for God's ten plagues upon the Egyptians, signs of God's displeasure at the enslavement of the Jews. All the plagues were bad, some more like annoyances (like the frogs and the insects) but the final plague was dead serious. God would send the Angel of Death over Egypt and strike down the first-born in all the houses. The only protection from such a death sentence was a ritual specified by God: slaughter a lamb, then paint its blood on your doorways. The Angel of death will see this sign and Pass Over your house. Meanwhile, prepare for departure, because this tenth plague will finally convince Pharaoh to let you go.

The instructions for a ritualistic meal go into great detail about cooking the lamb, and taking bread that isn't risen yet. Jewish writers told this story in explicit detail to encourage the celebration of this event with a Passover Seder every year, from generation to generation. We Christians have expanded the meaning of the word Passover, making Christ himself the Passover lamb. Every week we celebrate our Passover, when I break the bread and we say or sing, Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast!" Alleluia indeed!

We have many Passover moments in our lives, times when we are invited to let go of what enslaves us, whatever that might be, and celebrate new life in us –individually, or as a community, or as a nation. Breaking free from old habits, old assumptions – these are all Passover moments. But let us never trivialize this story. Let us always respect the profound movement of God in our lives, and celebrate it.