



**Therefore Let Us Keep the Feast**

Colossians 3:1-4, 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, and  
St. John 20:1-10

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In our Gospel lesson this morning we read St. John's account of that first Easter morning – of Mary's coming to the tomb where Jesus had been laid after being taken down from the cross. She arrived in the darkness just before sunrise and when she got there she found that giant stone that had been used to seal the tomb's entrance had been rolled away. She panicked, thinking that someone had stolen Jesus' body. In the other Gospel accounts we're told that when she went into the tomb she was met by an angel who calmed her and told her that the body wasn't stolen, but that Jesus had actually been raised from the dead. And so she ran to tell Peter and the other disciples the good news. When they came they ran into the tomb and, we're told, "saw" the empty linens used to wrap Jesus' body, and that they "believed" what the angel had told Mary.

Today we celebrate that empty tomb, but what are the implications of that empty tomb for us? I think it's easy to understand the implications of Jesus' death – he who was perfect, he who knew no sin, took our sins upon himself and died in payment for them. When we put our faith – our trust – in Jesus' sacrifice, we can stand before God and instead of seeing us clothed in the filthy, tattered, and stinking rags of sin, all he sees is the righteousness of Christ. Instead of being driven away from the holy presence of God by our sin, through Christ we are drawn into his holy presence. The fellowship with God that was lost when Adam and Eve sinned is restored as Jesus, the second Adam, sheds his blood to wash us clean. That's what Jesus did for us in his death. But what about his resurrection?

I think most Christians can pretty easily explain why Jesus had to die. But my experience is that we have a lot of difficulty explaining why his Resurrection was just as necessary. St. Paul explained the implications of the Resurrections to both the Colossian and Corinthian

Christians. Those are the two epistle lessons appointed for Easter. Look at today's with me. St. Paul writes:

**If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.**  
(Colossians 3:1-4)

Not only has our old and sinful self been crucified with Christ – dead and buried in that tomb with him – but we have also been raised with Christ. His death redeems us from our sins. Our "old man," as Paul calls him, was nailed to the cross with Christ and is now dead. But what then? You see, there has to be a "new man" to replace him. It's not enough to forgive our sins and put us on neutral ground before God. In Christ's resurrection we are raised with him. Just as our old man died on the cross with Jesus, our new man was born on that first Easter morning. St. Paul *could* have written something like this: "If then you have been crucified with Christ, know that your sins are dead, buried with Christ, in the grave." There are some that take the Gospel only far, but stop at that point. "I'm forgiven; that's enough. My sins are forgiven and when it comes to heaven, I'm good to go!" I guess that there's *some* comfort in knowing that our sins have been buried with Christ, but if the message stops at that point, there's no hope – nothing to turn our hearts and minds heavenward. There would be forgiveness, but we'd still be the same sinful people. There'd be no change. That's not the Gospel, it's only the first part of the story. Not to mention that without the Resurrection, Paul could *tell* us that we've been forgiven, but what evidence would we have of it? We'd always be asking, "Was Jesus sacrifice *really* good enough? Was it *really* accepted by the Father?" Was Jesus really God incarnate or just another guy making that claim like so many others?

You see, Jesus' resurrection solves all those problems. Because we have died with him, were also raised to new life in him. Because he was raised from the dead, we know that his sacrifice was acceptable to God – the Father didn't just leave him in the tomb. And because he

rose again, we see the validation of Jesus' message that he really was God incarnate – the second person of the Trinity come as one of us. Jesus resurrection doesn't leave us forgiven and just on neutral ground before the Father – it's the Resurrection that credits our account with something positive! It's because of the Resurrection that St. Paul can exhort us saying, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" and "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

Those are the two main implications of the Resurrection: First, a calling to a new kind of life – a righteous life lived for God – and, second, a hope for the future – a hope that tells us that there's more to life than the battle we fight here on earth.

St. Paul made exactly this point when he wrote to the Corinthian Christians, saying:

**If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.**

**But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.** (1 Corinthians 15:17-20)

The Gospel of the death *and* resurrection of Jesus Christ is the source of our new life. It's what the saints of the Old Testament hoped for and it's what the Old Testament prophets foretold would come. The Old Testament Law was a reminder of our sinfulness, but in it we only find death. The Law could never create life where there was death – it tells us what we should be doing, but it doesn't give us a way to do it. It gives a standard of holiness, but no way to live up to it. Ultimately it shows us our own sinfulness in light of the perfect and ultimate holiness of God. It reminds us, when we're tempted to rationalise our sin or think more highly of ourselves than we ought to, that were we to enter the presence of God as we are, we would merit nothing but eternal punishment. John Bunyan wrote:

Run, John, run, the Law commands  
But gives us neither feet nor hands,  
Far better news the Gospel brings:  
It bids us fly and gives us wings.

The Gospel message of Easter is what brings life to the dead. The practical application of the Easter message is found in the second Easter epistle lesson, which also happens to be from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians:

**Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.** (1 Corinthians 5:6b-8)

Christ as our Passover is a reference to the book of Exodus in the Old Testament. You all know the story of the ten plagues that God unleashed on Egypt because of Pharaoh's hardness of heart. In sending the final plague, God took the life of every firstborn son in Egypt. The Israelites were spared as they obeyed God's command to sacrifice a spotless, year-old lamb. The lamb was to be killed, roasted, and eaten and then the blood was painted on the lintel and doorposts of the home as a sign to the Angel of Death to "pass over" that house. By the blood of an innocent, the Israelites were saved. Note that they weren't called to make a personal sacrifice, cutting themselves and putting their own blood on the doorposts. What good was the shed blood of a sinner? They had to take the life of an innocent animal, guilty of no sin, and paint its blood on the doorposts. Their salvation was dependent not on themselves, but on the blood of another.

And so here the Apostle refers to that ancient event of the salvation of the Jewish people and describes Christ as *our* Passover lamb. The first Passover in Egypt pointed to Christ, the perfect Passover lamb. The Old Testament lamb was only that, a dumb animal, however innocent it may have been. There was nothing in that animal that could cover human sin, but in making the sacrifice the ancient Israelites made an acclamation of faith and put their trust in the gracious mercy of God to forgive them. Notice: God warned that his judgement was coming. If the people would only trust in what he told them to do – to sacrifice a pure lamb and paint its blood on the

doorpost, the angel of death would pass by. Ultimately it was a call to faith.

In Christ we see God himself, the Word Incarnate, humbling himself and becoming the *perfect* Passover sacrifice. We, too, were prisoners in the land of Egypt and in danger of death. We were once the captives and slaves of sin, prisoners of the Devil with no hope but an eternity of hell and damnation. But in Christ we have been delivered and led out of that slavery into a new life in the Promised Land of the Kingdom of God. St. Peter writes, "You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19). As we sing in one of the great Easter hymns:

Where the Paschal blood is poured,  
Death's dark angel sheathes his sword;  
Israel's hosts triumphant go  
Through the wave that drowns the foe.  
Praise we Christ, whose blood was shed,  
Paschal victim, Paschal bread;  
With sincerity and love  
Eat we manna from above.

By his sacrifice Christ has bought our freedom from the power of sin and death. We have the perfect Passover lamb in Christ. And so it's only "meet and right" that we "celebrate the feast." The blood of the first Passover lamb was painted on the doorposts for one night and served as the peoples' redemption for one night, but Christ is *always* our Passover lamb, as he pleads his shed blood before the Father constantly. And so shouldn't our celebration be constant too? I guess the question then is: How do we do that?

The Jewish Passover celebration required that the lamb be entirely consumed – nothing was to be left over. Maybe even more than painting the blood on the doorposts, this was the critical part of the Passover feast. It's just as critical for us. The most important thing for us is that we appropriate for ourselves the Passover Lamb. The eating of the lamb by the Israelites symbolised their appropriation of the blessing given by the lamb. Not understanding and not knowing about the future Messiah, the greatest symbol for them was the blood on the doorposts, but in eating the lamb they were also

symbolically appropriating its sacrifice for themselves. But where they did it once and did it symbolically, *we* do it as a spiritual reality and we do it constantly. We do it by faith. We rejoice over our Saviour, who died and rose for us. We claim his promises as our own and live day by day in the grace of God, allowing the Holy Spirit to do his sanctifying work of renewal in our lives. We set our minds on the things that are above knowing that even if we have not been physically raised to heaven, we have been spiritually raised to new life with Christ and that the Kingdom of God is a reality for us here and now.

We are an "Easter People," not because we celebrate the Feast of the Resurrection as it rolls around the Church's calendar every spring, but because we live daily, hour by hour and minute by minute, the new life that Christ has given us. We gather for corporate worship each Sunday, because it was on Sunday that Christ rose from the dead – each Sunday is effectively a "mini-Easter." But more than celebrating Easter once a year *or* every Sunday, we are to celebrate Easter every day. As Christians we have life because Christ has become our spiritual sustenance. Jesus has given us the bread and wine as an illustration of what he has done for us in giving his own body and blood as a sacrifice for sin. Our physical bodies will never survive without our daily bread and similarly we can never spiritually survive without daily coming to Christ, our Passover lamb, and keeping his feast. This is the only way that we can be confident and no longer fear death and judgement, devil and hell, because of our sins. St. Paul is calling us to exercise this faith constantly, in every part of our lives, in every need and temptation. This is how we appropriate the power of Christ's resurrection: by making our lives a constant celebration of Easter.

Whenever we gather together to hear the Gospel preached and to receive the Sacrament, and believe and take comfort in what's offered and sealed to us, we are partaking of our Passover lamb and rejoicing in his resurrection. Whenever our consciences accuse us and drive us to confess our sin in shame and sorrow, remembering again that on our own we earn nothing but God's anger and judgement, and yet we remember the words, "Who shall bring any charge

against God's elect?...It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead for us," we partake of our Passover lamb and celebrate his feast. When hard times and difficult situations beat us down and we don't feel like we have anything left and can't go on, but in faith repeat those words, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us," in this too we partake of Jesus by faith and celebrate his Passover feast. When we go to pray and realise how unworthy we are to come before the throne of God, but remember that we pray in the name of Jesus; or when we realise how kind the Lord is and that this grace is ours through Christ, and we lift our hearts in thanksgiving, all this is a celebration of Easter as we take comfort in what Christ has done for us, the Risen One. In him we rejoice in faith. When we find ourselves filled with the fear of death and hell and remember that the Risen One has already conquered death and hell, and our hearts and mouths sing St. Paul's song of triumph: "O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?" this is to believe in Christ, the Risen One and to rejoice in his victory.

We celebrate Easter as we do all of these things. The question is: Do we know it? Do we live with it? [Maybe you've never taken part in this celebration of Easter. You may not be a Christian and have never partaken of the new life of the Risen One and been raised to new life yourself. Christ died and rose for you too. If you can understand your own sinfulness, you can appropriate new life yourself. If you can understand that in your natural state, you are separated from the holy presence of God, you too can be reconciled to him through Christ. You too can take comfort in Jesus. If there is a hunger in you for God's grace and forgiveness of sins through Christ's death and resurrection, then take your place at the Easter table. The lamb is prepared also for you. Eat and partake of him by faith and your soul will be refreshed.] As Christians we know the celebration of Easter, but we can always know it better. We can always be more diligent about it. The more we make use of our Passover lamb, the more like him we will become, the more blessed we will be, and the closer to God we will come. I urge you, make your life a

constant celebration of Easter. Knowing that we have been raised with Christ, let us daily set our minds on things above, finding new life in our Risen Lord and at his Easter table. His table is always set and he is always ready for us to join him.

Let us pray: Almighty God, through your only Son Jesus Christ you have conquered death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: by your grace put good desires into our minds and, in your mercy, help us to bring them to their fulfilment, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.