

RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD (EASTER) – APRIL 17, 2022 – 1 CORINTHIANS 5:6-8

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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

⁶Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Thus far our text.

Welcome to the Divine Service on the greatest holiday of the Christian year! He is risen! He is risen indeed! Christmas is celebrated by most as the dearest holiday, maybe because we can relate to adoring a Baby born in a manger, and have so many family traditions that are inviolable. But, Easter is the celebration about the Resurrection, without which we would truly have no hope whatsoever. As we conclude the sacred Triduum today, started on Maundy Thursday, continuing through Good Friday and the Vigil of Easter last evening, we are struck by the fact that this is a special time. There is no other time where we have so many special services to mark the events in Christ's life; we rightly mark Holy Week as the most important time to spend time in God's house, receiving His gifts.

This Epistle reading might come as a bit of a surprise to some of you, that we're taking time to delve into three little verses from Paul's first letter to the Christians in Corinth. Shouldn't we be talking about the Gospel reading, where the women went to the tomb, found it empty, and left bewildered and trembling? Shouldn't we be talking about the Resurrection account from the other Gospels, where the angel delivered the message that He is not there, He is risen as He said? Shouldn't we be dwelling on the fact that because He is risen, we, too, will rise at the end of our earthly lives, and join Him in

heavenly glory? Yes, we should, and yes, we have, and yes, we will. But, there's something to be gained from Paul's words that might ordinarily be missed.

You see, the Old Testament sacrificial system bears into the discussion about the Resurrection. Jesus' rising from the dead is the fulfillment of the sacrifices of goats and bulls and lambs and crops that were lined out in the first five books of the Bible. The people had faith that their sins were going to be removed, not through offering these sacrifices, not by sending a perfect lamb out into the wilderness and slaughtering another one for the sins of the people. They understood that a descendant of David's line, promised all the way back in Genesis Chapter 3, would be the Savior of the world. He would come and live a sinless life, suffer and die the death of a criminal on the mount of Golgotha, and would rise on the Third Day. Because He kept His promises, and was at the same time a man and God incarnate, He would be able to do this wonderful work. Paul reminds the folks in Corinth that the same Savior they were promised from of old finds its fruition in Jesus the Christ.

This coming of Christ has implications for the lives of the Corinthians, and for us today. It impacts how we live our lives, the motivation for the good works that we do and the evil deeds that we avoid. We live lives informed by the fact that we're freed from the slavery of sin, to the freedom that is ours through Christ Jesus, our Lord. We are enabled to tell others of the reason for the joy that lies within us, especially those that are near and dear to us, those that will actually give us the time of day, that will believe what we have to say because they trust us already. Let's talk about what Paul is getting at in this passage, and how it can inform our understanding of Easter day.

What's all this talk about leavened and unleavened bread? Why is yeast so important? This isn't getting into the weeds; rather, it's important for us to understand as we talk about our Easter joy. Jesus used this same example when He was teaching His apostles – He warned them that the leaven of the Pharisees was dangerous, and would lead to their destruction. Three times in Matthew 16, as well as in Mark 8 and Luke 12, Jesus warns the disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.

What does Jesus mean here? He's talking about teaching, the base ingredient of making bread, to be sure, but also the underpinning of the entire faith. The Pharisees were starting with a skewed version of the Word of God – everything else that they would interpret would be flawed because of it. They had abandoned hope of the Savior coming from the lineage of David, of Abraham, of Adam and Eve – He had taken so long in coming, that they believed that it was purely metaphorical that there would be a Redeemer of the world. Rather, they thought that they would be saved by perfect adherence to the Law of God – that was the hope that they held out to the people, if it could be called hope at all. Of course, we know that this is impossible for everyone but Jesus Himself. However, it was a good way to increase the number of offerings that the people brought to the priests, and since they got a “cut” or a “slice” of each offering, they were getting quite rich off of the guilt of the people.

They were teaching that He, the Son of God, was nothing but a charlatan. It's easy to get caught up in this thinking, especially if you aren't familiar with the Old Testament prophecies that find their fulfillment in Jesus' earthly life, death, and Resurrection. To avoid the leaven of the Pharisees means to avoid their false teaching – don't let it pollute your minds and hearts, but cling to the truth. In the case of the apostles, they had the best source possible – the very Son of God, Second Person of the Trinity, in their midst to answer their questions and preach the truth to them. In our day, we have what's even better – we have the Word of God, which is powerful unto salvation. We have the Old and New Testaments put together into a unified whole, so that it's easy to see the connections between them. We have the Holy Spirit to guide us and lead us, and to interpret the Scriptures for us. In order to avoid the leaven, which seems attractive and seems to make sense, we need to take advantage of doctrinally pure sources when we're picking resources to use within the church and within our homes. While our Synod's publishing house isn't infallible, the folks in charge of doctrinal review down in St. Louis are pretty good at sifting out the leaven, and providing us with unleavened bread. Why would we go to

sources written by folks that don't believe as we do, when we have a host of resources that are written by faithful Lutheran pastors?

Jesus didn't use this example out of thin air – talking about leaven resonated with the disciples, because they were familiar with the Passover. When God gave the Israelites the command to move out from the clutches of sinful Pharaoh, after the tenth plague of the firstborn, He instructed Moses to tell the people to be ready to move at a moment's notice. They were to make bread without yeast in it, because it would be ready to eat much sooner than waiting for the leaven to raise the bread – the chemical reaction between the bacteria takes hours, and they might not have hours to spare in their flight. God rescued His people, and they were to remember this rescue by celebrating this Passover meal every year, and there were specific directions and rules that the Israelites were to follow. They were to not only not use leavened bread for the ceremony, but part of the preparation for the Passover was to search their houses, and eliminate any sign or stock of yeast within the house. The priest would come and verify that they didn't have any leaven in the house, so that they could be deemed worthy to celebrate the feast in sincerity and truth. Any leaven found in the house was cause for great concern, and so the “white glove test” was crucial to their preparation for the feast – they were to celebrate the Passover exactly as God laid it out through Moses.

Why did they do this? So that they could realize that it was part of the great plan of God to free them from their slavery in Egypt, that it was something possible only with the intervention of God, and that they were to give thanks and praise to Him for saving their very lives – both here in time and even in eternity. He saved them from their physical slavery – that's very clear. He also saved them from eternal damnation – they deserved this because of their continual rebellion against Him. Over and over again they sinned against God, grossly worshipping false gods like golden calves and the like. They later adopted the false worship practices of the Canaanites, and intermarried with foreign women and adopted their false beliefs. However, God continually forgave them – a great case study of this

forgiveness of God is found in the book of Hosea, where Hosea forgave his unfaithful wife over and over again, to show the continued forgiveness of God toward His people.

But, what does this have to do with us today? We are to cleanse the leaven from our lives – we are to seek to keep the faith that we've been given pure and chaste, unsullied by false belief and temptation to sin and vice. We have a tendency to boast – both of our earthly wealth, and in our contribution toward our own salvation. We want to think that we have at least a LITTLE part in the eternal equation of salvation – maybe we play a SMALL role by deciding to follow Jesus. Or, maybe our good works have some bearing on whether or not we are included in heavenly glory. The truth is that we are, before we are redeemed by Christ the crucified, dead in our sins and iniquities. Dead people don't do anything! If we think that there's anything for us to boast about, we are dead wrong!

We are to celebrate the feast in sincerity and truth. This means that we seek to be pure in what we say and do, in what we use in the Divine Service, that everything that we use here be right and proper, not polluted with the leaven of false doctrine, or even lead people astray in some other way. When we have such an unbroken history in the Christian church as to what is right and proper, and what leads people into false belief, great shame, and vice, we ought to learn from it. Remember the historians' credo – we must study our history, so that we aren't doomed to repeat it! Some might say that we are unnecessarily inflexible or rigid. I would counter that we are dealing with the things of God – what more important things to get right are there? If we don't have the leaven of false doctrine even being flirted with, it's easier to avoid the temptation to sin. We are to keep ourselves pure, striving to be obedient to that which we've been given in the Word of God and the Book of Concord, which is in every part a faithful exposition of the Word of God. We don't have to reinvent the wheel here – we are given the tools to be faithful, we just have to use them!

Thanks be to God that the Passover lamb has been sacrificed – the promise has been kept by God, as He always keeps His promises. That's what we celebrate today – that our sins have been paid

for, that the death that was necessary for our sins and our sinful nature has occurred, and that He is no longer dead, but alive, because He was and is God. When the Israelites followed the sacrificial system of the Pentateuch, they understood that these sacrifices wouldn't themselves atone for sin; rather, God set them up to point ahead to the coming of the Messiah later on in history, that would atone for the sins of the world. God had them go through these rituals so that they would understand what the promised Savior would have to go through. He would be beaten, scourged, and ultimately killed in a horribly violent way, just like the animals would be slaughtered on the altar and burned to make a fragrant offering to God. He would be a man of sorrows, living in lonely places, much like the lamb that was sent out into the wilderness along with the lamb that was killed. There had to be a death for sin, and the only way that that death would count for all humanity would be that Jesus Himself, true God, the Second Person of the Trinity, were the One that would die. He had to be man in order to die – God cannot die, He is eternal – the only way He could die is that He was also fully man at the same time. He had to be God in order to rise from the dead – once a human being dies, the only way he comes back to life is through God's intervention – for more information, see Lazarus and the son of the widow at Nain. Both of these natures, the human and the divine, were present in the Person and work of our Savior, Jesus Christ. As we learned on Good Friday, Jesus said it best – "It is finished!" Sin's reign over this world has been defeated, the devil has been banished back to his permanent home of the hell of fire, and Jesus has won the victory for us, so that we need no longer fear the punishment our sins deserve, but through His sacrifice, things have been made right between us and God.

Easter Sunday is THE high feast in the Christian church year. There's nothing more important than the Resurrection; without it, we'd have no hope. Jesus would be just a good man who lived on earth, and died, and this would have no permanent effect upon us. It's great that so many folks are here in church to receive the gifts of God together in this place; I just wish that we had such a large crowd every Sunday. While Easter is the biggest Sunday of the church year, at the same time every Sunday is a

little Easter. When we receive the Word and especially the Sacrament in this place every Lord's Day, we partake of the fruits of His sacrifice on the cross, for the forgiveness of our sins, the strengthening of our bodies and souls, and the promise of eternal life when our earthly lives are over. I don't quite understand why so many folks let other things get in the way of receiving these gifts every Sunday; when you consider the 168 hours that are in every week, it doesn't seem like too much to spend an hour or two hearing the Word of God and receiving His gifts on a regular basis. But, I digress – sorry!

We are cautioned by Jesus and St. Paul to avoid the leaven of the Pharisees, to guard against having leaven in our homes at all, because the false teaching that is meant by leaven is easy to be hoodwinked by. False doctrine masquerades as the truth; it “makes sense” to us, even though it violates the Word of God; it creeps in slowly, starting with the little, insignificant things, until it rears its ugly head with nasty false doctrine. We must constantly be on our guard that false teaching doesn't invade the sacred space of God's house, the church, and His holy temple, our body and soul. We must be on our guard to consult pure, right, doctrinally pure sources. We must be familiar with the Word of God so that we can be discerning of leavened versus unleavened sources. We become familiar with the Word of God by studying it, in Bible study here in the church, in private study, and by availing ourselves of the teaching that takes place in the Divine Service. Let us go forth in peace, knowing that our sins are forgiven, that the sacrifice for sin has been paid, and that we are freed to serve God here in time and there in eternity. He has truly done everything for our salvation. He is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.