

## **EASTER SUNRISE SERVICE – April 17, 2022**

### **Opening Prayer**

On this day we overflow with thanks and praise, O God, for this is the day You have made; a day that fills us with both fear and great joy. On this day You sent Your angels to roll back the stone and You raised Jesus, who had been crucified, from the dead. Never again need we search for Jesus in the places of dead memories and buried dreams, for now He has been raised and goes forever ahead of us to open the gates of justice, preaching peace and the forgiveness of sins. Indeed, though He was the stone rejected by the builders, You have made Him the cornerstone, the Rock on which is founded the life everlasting, the life that is hidden for us in Christ until it is revealed with Christ in glory. We thank You and we praise You O God, both now, and through Your living word, eternally. Amen.

*Isaiah 25:6-9: “On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And He will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; He will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of His people He will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, so that He might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”*

What’ll you eat today? I imagine a great many of us will begin our day’s food consumption in just a few minutes with what’s sure to be a fabulous breakfast cooked by some of the men of the church. I wonder if they’re doing pancakes today, I always did like pancakes and I know you do too! Later on, my guess is that quite a few of us will sit with our families and friends and partake in the ubiquitous Easter ham. Believe it or not, I never really liked ham until a few years ago...just about the same time as I started liking tomatoes. Mom says that’s when my tastebuds, unlike the rest of me, *finally matured*. And then tonight for dinner, what will it be? A ham and cheese sandwich perhaps? That is, assuming there’s room left over after lunch. My family’s usual Easter feast always sees me eating so much that I swear I’ll never eat again. Obviously, that’ll be as false an oath this year as it’s been every year prior.

*Here, having arrived joyfully on Easter Sunday, isn’t it interesting to think that all of this begins with eating?*

Way, way back in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve take bites of forbidden fruit, yielding to the dark power of temptation. They want to be like God, to know what he knows, to see what he sees. But it backfires. God is displeased and they haven’t learned much save that they’re naked. Next thing you know they’re sent to live the remainder of their lives East of Eden. It’s a place where the ground requires work to bring forth food and women must undergo pains in labor. There, after the fall, God says to Adam and Eve – *“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”*

It’s there, where death enters the scene. Death generally accompanies sin if you believe the Bible. But even back then, even back when God ejects Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, He makes them a promise. Given to them by a gracious God is the promise of a coming day of Victory. God tells that dirty snake, that symbol of evil and death that his days are numbered – *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”* John Calvin called this verse the protoevangelium. The pre-Gospel if you will for in this verse God announces his intent to destroy evil and sin and even death through the heel of a man.

This man, of course, is Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.

Down through the ages, from the Garden of Eden all the way through works of the Old Testament, prophets and teachers spoke of this coming. Every verse, every syllable in the Old Testament points to Him.

This is the Jesus Christ, according to Paul in his letter to the Philippians “*who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross.*”

That’s where we’ve been these last six weeks leading up to this day –remembering Jesus and His walk to Jerusalem and the Cross. Before his demise, the Romans had tortured Him, His friends had betrayed Him or abandoned Him. Crowds of people who’d cheered him previously screamed out – Crucify Him. For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate. They nailed Him to a cross at 9 in the morning. There, on Calvary, His blood trickled to the ground. At three o’clock, He died. To the entire world it looked as though death had done to Him what it had done to all the people from Adam and Eve forward. It appeared as though death, that ravenous and rapacious creditor had swallowed Him up forever.

*But this time, the tables were turned.* This time, a woman approaches a grave in tears and the next thing she knows she’s chatting with the very man she mourns over. This time, two men walking to Emmaus break bread and find themselves joined in their meal by none other than Jesus. The same Jesus who’d died on a Roman Cross just three days prior.

On the third day He rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. You see, this time, God intervened. Death, that awful consumer of souls is, in Jesus Christ, swallowed up by the power of the Almighty God to use language from our Isaiah passage. The eater becomes the eaten, so to speak.

And so what began with a rebellious bite of forbidden fruit so many years ago comes to a joyous resolution with a rich and sumptuous feast.

Isaiah writes – “*On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And He will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; He will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of His people He will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.*”

Jesus Christ emerges from the tomb 2000+ years ago. NT Wright, writing about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ writes– “This is an event for which there was no precedent and of which there remains as yet no subsequent example, an event involving neither the resuscitation nor abandonment of a physical body but its transformation into a new mode of physicality.” And that’s really good theology talk. What he means to say is that because Christ is resurrected in the body, we catch a glimpse of what we’ll be like in the Kingdom of God. That Christ’s resurrection means that after we die, we will be us, only transformed by the same power of God that raised Jesus Christ from the dead...the same power that’s transforming our lives as we follow Jesus Christ.

But you know what I think? I think I like Isaiah’s language a little bit better. It involves eating after all. Isaiah tells us that because God swallows up death in Jesus Christ, *the feast has begun!*

Every time we come to the Lord’s Table we taste the goodness of the God who gave the world His only Son. Every time we break bread with one another in the name of Jesus Christ, He is there with us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Easter is here. The party has started. Or, as Isaiah puts it – “*For this is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.*”

Christ is Risen. He is Risen Indeed!

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