

Isaiah 25:6-9 English Standard Version

⁶ On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.

⁷ And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.

⁸ He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

⁹ It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 English Standard Version

⁶ Your 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.

Luke 24:13-49 English Standard Version On the Road to Emmaus

¹³ That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" ¹⁹ And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he

was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. ²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." ²⁵ And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. ²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹ but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ **When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.** ³¹ **And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.** And he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" ³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

³⁶ As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" ³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. ³⁸ And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.

⁴⁴ **Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the**

Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,⁴⁶ and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

Sermon. **Today is the happiest day of the church calendar for us.** While we all love Christmas Eve – it is my personal favorite worship service - today is the day when we celebrate **the fulfillment of God’s promises** He first gave the people of Israel during the Exodus. Indeed, these promises are the message that we read throughout all of the Bible. God has not only created us, but has saved and redeemed us from the mess we have made of ourselves and the rest of Creation. He has brought us out from the captivity that we have been mired in. He is our God and we are His people. That is the cause of our joy beyond measure.

Today’s **Gospel text has us on the road to Emmaus as a pair of disciples are walking along, in wonder at what they have seen and heard in Jerusalem** after the despair of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Not surprisingly, their human mindsets can’t fully grasp what has happened and its meaning. The risen Jesus falls in with them and talks with them along the way and at supper. He opens their hearts and minds to what the week has meant. **This is a very new world that they are in. The old religion – note that religion is very different from faith - has been overwhelmed by the direct act of God and life can never be the same.**

The Isaiah text for today is equally powerful. The text for today follows a chapter that details how bad it has been for the people as they lived in their sins and suffered the consequences of their actions. **The message of today’s text is one of restoration and joy.**

So, **today's theme is one of joy – God has redeemed us. He is present with us. The disciples have witnessed this monumental event** – the seeming end of a promising ministry reversed as not the ministry they thought they were participating in, but one **which restored mankind to the God of its salvation.** You have to imagine what those **first witnesses were filled with – endless joy and equally endless questions** – as they pondered, or as we would say today, processed, the experiences and news. **Life cannot be the same. Ever again.**

We all shake our heads 'yes', even with that hyperbole. But, **what does it mean to us** – just as we can see in Scripture what it meant to those who witnessed this watershed event of sacrifice and resurrection? **Paul's words** today are a start. **Get over yourselves. Witness to Christ in your lives. Do not keep living with all those sinful habits, but, rather, change your lives to live in the promise and fulfillment of Christ.** (my paraphrasing).

Today we would say that this was a tectonic shift in Creation – God Immanuel among us and atoning for us, forever. **Cleopas and his fellow traveler friend immediately grasped that this is what happened.** Think about it. They are on the way home from Jerusalem, a city full of Roman soldiers, Sadducee collaborators and corrupt temple officials. And horrific memories of the last few days. Yet, **the news and knowledge that Jesus the Christ was still among them, risen from the tomb, caused them to turn around and return to what we might call their lion's den. They had news that could not wait** and was as critical to everyone else as if they had discovered the cure for some terrible physical disease and were compelled to share it.

The world would never be the same, simply because the cup of wrath had been drunk and we were freed to drink from the alternative – the cup of redemption.

We must take note of what Jesus tells the assembled disciples – that they are witnesses of the redemption of mankind and the example of living Kingdom lives and will be given power from God directly. **He did not appear to them to make them feel better. To relieve their distress. I think that this appearance was to challenge them.** I think that a **paraphrase** of his words

might be: ***"You have been appointed as witnesses of the power of God and His redemption of mankind. I am giving you my Father's promise and He will bring to you His power and authority to witness to all these things."***

Paul echoes this as he tells the Corinthian congregation to stop living as they always have – caught up in themselves. He admonishes them to stop boasting of themselves, to stop living maliciously and with evil, and, instead, to **live in the truth that Christ has provided.**

What are our aspirations? For sure, we have very tangible aspirations – possibly work related. Possibly family related. Possibly something else you are passionate about. What we celebrate today – our Passover – may give us those things as by products, but **we are challenged by the texts themselves to live beyond them - To aspire to follow Christ in our living each day of our lives.** Don't be a gossip. Don't shade the truth. Don't try to be first in line for everything. And so much else we should do as we aspire to be God's people and to follow the example of His Christ.

We, with Cleopas and all those early disciples and their world, have been given the greatest gift of all – reconciliation with our Creator. We have been given the template for Kingdom living. **It is just as Jesus had told Nicodemus** – that we need to be reborn in the very Spirit of Creation and that Christ has given us the way to this. It is not a checklist, as Nicodemus may have hoped. **It is not a one and done event. It is to embrace the gift of redemption and seize all that it empowers in us. To live with the knowledge that God is here. Today. And will be here tomorrow, as well. That He calls us to witness of Him.**

To be sure, God is very much in charge – sovereign – but He has called us to be His witnesses. **The gift of this day – our atonement and reconciliation – is the greatest news and reality that the world has known.** Cleopas and his friend were compelled to return to Jerusalem and share the news. Paul was compelled to travel throughout the eastern Roman world to share the Good News. The directive through Micah – to live with compassion, to seek to live your own life justly and to walk humbly with God – is so alien to so many that it is not even aspirational to many. **What are we doing with this greatest of gifts?**

Rejoice. Embrace Kingdom living. Witness in your life what God has done. This may seem a tall order in this dysfunctional world we live in, but we can do this in God's grace alone, in faith alone, in Christ alone, through Scripture alone while we give all glory to God alone.

SoliDeo gloria. Amen.