

It's Easter...Again!

A sermon based on Isaiah 12:1-6

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

Doesn't it just drive you insane? It does for me. You know what I'm talking about? It was September, and you just causally stroll into Fred's and were greeted by what? Yep, Christmas stuff, decorations out already. And not just that, but some of it is already on sale. You know, I thought seeing the "Back to School" sales starting in July was bad enough. But September, we're almost 4 months away, still have two major holidays to get through (Halloween and Thanksgiving), but they're skipping past those straight to Christmas. It's enough to make you just want to shake your head.

Well, their determination to be ahead of the game for Christmas preparation got me thinking, and well, I think I'm going to set a new record today, actually be way ahead of the stores on this one. Nope, not advertising Black Friday sales already. Not putting that Halloween candy on clearance just yet. Maybe you've heard me say it before, how every Sunday is like a mini-Easter celebration. So, today, I don't just want you to start prepping for Easter. Today, we are celebrating Easter.

What do you think? "Yes, it's Easter again!" Or, "Oh, Easter...again."

Friends, what is the right approach we should take here? Maybe this will help...*Watch video*

Can you think of a moment when you first heard such life-changing news? Take a second. How did you react? For me, it was January 15th of this year, a Thursday afternoon. The phone rang. I thought it was just a piano mom, calling to cancel a lesson. But when Becky came running down to my office a few minutes later with tears in her eyes, that's when I knew. We had been matched. A family had chosen us to adopt their baby girl. Our lives would forever change, would never be the same.

But what's even more interesting about that day is, it couldn't have been more than a couple hours earlier, we were talking about how we assumed another family had probably already been matched. We were preparing to move on.

You think the disciples and others of Jesus followers were at the same point that Sunday morning? Coming to terms with their loss, starting to figure out how they would move on? And then one message turned their world upside-down. "The grave is empty. He is risen!" First, they heard it from some ladies, then reports starting flowing in, from Peter, from the Emmaus disciples, and finally, from Jesus himself!

And what they witnessed that day, what they heard, wasn't soon forgotten. No, it ignited a movement and the message spread like wildfire. Almost two thousand years later, we're proof of that, and today, 6 months away from Easter, we get to remember why we're here and what the good news of the resurrection means to us.

And...what's your reaction?

Are you still so excited? Or...have you forgotten? You know, I'm always appreciative when we have this day, and hopefully you are, too, when we get to sing some of our favorite Easter hymns, when we get to focus again on the wonderful Easter story. This is the holiday I wouldn't mind lasting.

But, tomorrow comes, our Easter celebration is over, it's back to the grind of work, of kids, of school, of life. Then, where does the excitement and the rejoicing and the celebrating go?

Well, it's fun to enjoy Jesus' resurrection today, that he lives today...but what about tomorrow, when my co-worker is in tears because her mother passed away or when I get the news my grandma or high school friend or neighbor down the road has taken a turn for the worse and it's looking like any day now?

Or, how can I always stay as happy as I feel right now when out there work will continue to stress me out, house projects will continue to consume my free time, the way our society is "progressing" will continue to eat at me and frustrate me? How can I be happy about Jesus' resurrection then?

Friends, sometimes I wonder if we wouldn't be better off if we were in the same situation as the Old Testament believers. Do you know why? Did they get to experience Easter? No! Then, how in the world could they keep going and be so excited when all they had to go on was just a promise?

I mean, listen again to our verses from Isaiah, "In that day you will say: "I will praise you, Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. 2 Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation." 3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. 4 In that day you will say: "Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. 5 Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. 6 Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you."

Not just Isaiah, but all of the Old Testament Israelites looked forward to "that" day, "that" glorious day when God's anger would finally subside because Jesus endured it in its entirety on the cross and came out on top as he rose, victorious over sin, Satan, and the grave. And not just looked forward to it, but were eagerly anticipating it.

But what about us? Do we look back with the same excitement? Or has it become old news? It must be kind of like what happens at Christmas...you know what I mean? Who of us doesn't get excited as the day gets closer? And I'll admit, seeing Christmas stuff in the stores already kind of has Christmas on my mind as well. And, as the days get closer, the excitement ramps up, especially, if there's something you really want and are hoping to get, like a new tool, a new purse, that new video game or doll.

And then Christmas Eve and Christmas Day come, the fun church services pass, the Christmas music on the radio stops playing, the decorations come down, and most importantly, the presents get opened and played with, and then what happens? That tool or purse or video game or doll you really wanted gets some use and then starts to sit or at the very least begins to lose its luster...not all that exciting anymore.

Is that what has happened with us and Easter? It's come, it's done, yeah, yeah, Jesus rose, now what's next? It's Easter...again...Jesus rose...so what?

Friends, I get it. Expecting the resurrection to be on your mind 24/7 is seemingly impossible, right? But what if it wasn't? Then what our video said is so true for you, today, right now, even 6 months away from Easter. You remember what it said? "What it meant for them is what it means for us!" Jesus

rose...so what??? Friends, believers, Jesus' resurrection doesn't just mean Jesus, friend, brother, teacher, is now alive. Jesus' resurrection means everything!

Isaiah gets it, and thank the Lord he shares it with us. Enjoy the beauty of the gospel here. Do you know what day is "that" day he refers to? Well, let's see...when do we make God angry? Daily. When does God turn from his anger and comfort us with his forgiveness? Daily. When are we recipients of his salvation? Daily! And why does God do all this for us? Because of the resurrection.

Friends, it's simple. Jesus' resurrection means everything for you and me today and every day. Every day we screw up. Every day we sin. And every day, we get to draw from the well of salvation, a spring that was bubbling up ever since God's first gospel promise in Eden, a spring that finally burst forth that first Easter. And every day, we get to drink the cool refreshing waters of Christ's forgiveness, won for us through his life and death, and guaranteed for us through his glorious and triumphant resurrection.

So guess what? Today, 6 months away from Easter is that day. We get to enjoy and rejoice in the victory we have over sin and Satan because Jesus lived, Jesus died, and Jesus rose, today.

You know, a lot of professional sports teams, after they win a game, they'll usually encourage their fans to wear that team's colors the next day to celebrate the victory. So, for instance, NFL teams who win today will deem tomorrow "Victory Monday!"

Because Jesus rose, because Jesus lives, today is "Victory Sunday!" Tomorrow is "Victory Monday," then "Victory Tuesday," and well, I think you know where I'm going with this. Every day we live in the afterglow of Jesus' Easter victory. We get to do that, and so, it's not Easter...again. It's Easter again, and we rejoice, right?

I don't think any soldier or general ever gets tired of winning battles. No sports teams says, "Ok, we're done playing for the season because we've won too many times." In the same way, we don't tire of hearing this Easter news, the news of Christ's victory for us! I had a friend who actually suggested that we should celebrate Easter in church even more often, like every few months. That's a great idea, and here's why. We are involved in a fight each day after the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature, and we can't ever hear enough that we win.

And that's exactly what Christ's resurrection does. It consoles us with news of victory so that we can console others with that same good news. That's the other part of it being Easter again! We get to enjoy it! But, as Isaiah not so subtly hints here, we share it, too. Just look at the gospel-motivated commands and encouragements he gives us..."Call on his name...Proclaim...Make known what he has done...Sing to the LORD..Shout aloud."

You get the idea? We have good news. We have the best news, and there's no better time to share it than now.

You know, watching that video got me thinking. I tried a little exercise this week (with Easter on my mind), and emailed, texted, or called someone I knew, and all I said was this, "I have some good news for you...He's risen!" That was it.

Now, I'll tell you ahead of time, most of my friends are believers, but the responses I got were pretty awesome. One joked, "Did I sleep through the winter?" But what was even better was this, "I needed

that. 15 minutes ago my day took a turn for the worse..." And you can imagine the encouragement I got to give him from there.

I would seriously suggest you try it, this week. We're so far away from Easter, that's probably the last thing on most people's minds. Make it the first. With so many things in our world today going so wrong, give them the one thing that's so right. He is risen! The grave is empty! And see how the conversation will take off from there. It can be your co-worker, your friend, a relative. Try it!

Believers, it's Easter again! I hope your attitude each day reflects that. And for those days when you're stressed or worried or tired or weary, days when the resurrection joys starts to become old news, try a new perspective. Look forward to final resurrection. Yeah, it's "Victory" day every day here because Jesus lived, died, rose, and now lives again. But what will get you through this life, through every day, is knowing this: I know that my Redeemer lives, and whenever he returns will be "Eternal Victory Day!" That will bring unending joy, so share some of that right now! Amen.