

“The Easter Response”—Acts 2:42-44

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Easter Response”, is Acts 2:42-44 → *They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

While living in St. Louis, Missouri, the husband of a couple with whom we were friends asked my wife an interesting question: “What is Easter?” While the context which prompted the question has escaped me, we were rather surprised that he didn’t know what Easter was all about? Everyone knows what Easter is all about, right? How could one not know? Easter is considered a major holiday in our country with all the good candy taking over the stores, Easter bunnies leaving stuff in a basket for kids, coloring Easter eggs, going on Easter egg hunts, decorations of pastel everywhere and families getting together with the traditional feast. How could someone live in our country and not know

what Easter is all about?

Unfortunately, such is the Easter response of many people in our world who could describe all I've just said and still not know what Easter **is** all about. While the true meaning of Easter may seem like a “no brainer” for the one who has been brought up in the Christian faith, or had become a Christian at some point in his life, there are countless millions in our own country whose Easter response is simply bunnies, baskets and birds (i.e. a feast with turkey). While the Christian celebrates the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and the new life He gives through the Holy Spirit now and eternally, the closest concept of new life which those millions might verbalize is a celebration of Spring with new life springing forth in nature.

The actions of the Christians recorded in our text reveal a proper Easter response, that is, one which flows from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and not from fantasy. It is a celebration of new life, but not simply new life in nature. It's about a new life which springs forth from the power of the Holy Spirit working in your heart. It's truly about new life especially as you deal with sin and death.

On the day when Jesus filled His disciples with the Holy Spirit, He gave them the ability to proclaim the Word of God to Jews from many different nations gathered in Jerusalem to worship at the temple. Speaking about Jesus of Nazareth Peter revealed to them from the Old

Testament Scriptures that He was their promised Messiah (cf. Acts 2:1-35).

Then the striking blow came with his words in Acts 2:36 → *Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus **Whom you crucified**.*

While it is very probable that there were people present in the crowd who had been instrumental in crucifying Jesus, it is also probable that many of those people had not been present to have a hand in His crucifixion fifty days before Peter spoke these words. How could Peter point the finger at them and say, **Whom you crucified?** His statement drove deeper than simply “you” in the sense of *all the house of Israel*, even though those Jews responsible for Jesus’ crucifixion had said, *His blood be on us and on our children* (cf. Matthew 27:25). It was a statement which actually *cut them to the heart*, so much so that three thousand of them repented of their sins, believed in Jesus as the Christ and were baptized (cf. Acts 2:37-41). You see, it was our sins—theirs, yours and mine—which took Jesus to His crucifixion where He willingly offered Himself as the once-for-all atoning sacrifice for those sins.

It is only when you truly face your sinfulness with its shame in God’s presence that you are prepared to hear the forgiveness which God has for you in Christ. It is then that you know the true meaning of Easter as the new life you have today with a heart cleansed of sin and a life directed by the Holy Spirit. Every aspect of your life takes on a new

perspective because of the Person & Work of the Lord Jesus.

Thus, your Easter response will be much different than that of the world's. The response of these new Christians to Peter's proclamation reflected their desire for continued fellowship with the Lord Jesus and each other. The Holy Spirit creates the longing to hear and live God's Word together as a response to the Easter event with the new life created in our hearts. Let's look at the Easter response of these disciples of Jesus, an example which we still follow to this day.

- *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching* (verse 42a). The Holy Spirit creates a desire for God's Word, both in hearing it preached and reading it. It continues *to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus* (cf. 2 Timothy 3:15). You need to be reminded constantly that you are saved by grace through faith in Jesus **alone**, especially since the devil is constantly tempting you to trust in anything other than the work of Christ **alone**.

The Holy Spirit also creates the desire to live in obedience to your Lord Jesus. God's written Word is your source, as 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says: *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, **equipped***

for every good work. Just as Jesus submitted Himself to God's written Word so you too want to submit to that same Word given through the apostles. Paul recognized this faith when he said, we . . . *thank God constantly . . . that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, **which is at work in you believers*** (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:13).

- Notice the disciples in our text also *devoted themselves to . . . the fellowship* (verse 42b). *The fellowship* refers to the common faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior which they shared especially in worshiping together. Thus . . .
- *they devoted themselves . . . to the breaking of bread and the prayers* (verse 42c). Jesus had instituted the Lord's Supper, telling His disciples to eat His body and drink His blood as they experienced His presence and the forgiveness of their sins (cf. Matthew 26:26-27), along with His command to do so in remembrance of Him (cf. Luke 22:19). It is an expression of our common union according to 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 → *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? It is. The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? It is. For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.* (KJV) Thus, while we

proclaim the Lord's death when we fellowship together at the altar *until He comes back again on the Last Day* (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:26), it is truly an Easter response as we are renewed to live in obedience to God's Word in our daily vocations, relationships and tasks. We also fellowship together in prayer for and with one another as we watch for Christ's 2nd Coming (cf. Ephesians 6:18; James 5:16).

Another Easter response which the Holy Spirit created in these first Christians was a concern for each other as members of God's family. Verse 44 of our text says *all who believed were together and had all things in common*. This common union in the faith even displayed itself as they sold *their possessions and belongings* and distributed *the proceeds to all, as any had need* (cf. Acts 2:45). The Holy Spirit gave them a new heart of generosity, viewing their possessions with the desire to share with others in need. Faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior will express itself in very real and concrete ways in a desire to bring the saving gifts of God in Jesus to others. They took care of each other so that they could care for others. Galatians 6:10 says: *As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith*.

What is your Easter response? The proper Easter response is ongoing rather than seasonal. It is filled with a new heart, washed clean from sin in your baptism and everyday as the Holy Spirit works through

God's written Word and His Communion. This faith accompanies you within the context of the sinful world in which you live, work and play **everyday**. It is reflected in the "ecclesia"—that's the Greek word we translate into English as "church." It means "the called out ones." The proper Easter response of faith in the Lord Jesus is nourished with "the communion of saints" who are called out of the world and assemble together to distribute and receive God's gifts of grace in prayer, praise and giving thanks.

The desire of many Christians to gather together to share these gifts of God's grace, fellowshiping in each other's physical presence, has heightened over the past six weeks with the suspension of public worship. That desire is the natural longing given by the Holy Spirit to be church together, "the communion of saints," sharing the gifts of God in Word and Sacrament. Hopefully you will continue to see the importance of following the Holy Spirit when you have the privilege to gather again. Commit yourself to worship with your fellow believers in Jesus **regularly** . . . not because you now appreciate what you didn't have for awhile, but because you *know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus*, Who has given you your identity as Church. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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