

Easter Day Yr B, 8/04/2012
Isa 25:6-9
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“Pictures of God’s victory celebration”

According to one tradition upheld by the Jewish rabbis, the following quote was quite popular: “A person will have to give an account on judgement day for every good thing that [s]he might have enjoyed, and did not.” In a similar train of thought, Martin Luther is quoted as saying: “Whoever does not love wife, wine, and song, remains a fool his whole life long.” Christianity, contrary to the critics, is not a killjoy faith. Joy and laughter have an important place in our lives as people of faith. Thus there is no better day then to share the following joke with you than on Easter Sunday!

The pastor of a small congregation was being proselytized by some energetic missionaries. He listened for a while and then said to them: “Gentlemen, look. I have a proposal that will settle this. I have here a glass of poison. If you will drink this poison and remain alive, I will join your church—and not only myself, but my entire congregation. But if you won’t drink the poison, well, then, I can only conclude that you are false ministers of the gospel because you do not trust that your Lord would not let you perish.”

This put the missionaries in a bind, so they went off to a corner to put their heads together, and they said, “What on earth are we going to do?” Finally, after a while, they decided. They came back and approached the minister and said, “Tell you what. We’ve got a plan. You drink the poison, and we’ll raise you from the dead!”¹

Speaking of drinking, today’s first lesson from Isaiah highlights a different kind of drinking, as well as a different kind of eating. As I read and reflected on this passage, I began to think of it as a series of pictures

describing God's victory celebration. The place is Mount Zion in Jerusalem. The time is some future date when the Messiah will usher in the kingdom of God in a more complete way.

The first picture the prophet gives us is that of God's victory banquet. The prophet says the LORD of hosts shall be the host of a huge victory banquet; where all peoples shall feast on the richest of foods and the highest quality wines. What a time that shall be! One big party for all peoples—from every nation, ethnic group, race and walk of life. We shall have the time of our lives. There shall be an abundance of food and drink for everyone. No more hunger or thirst. What wonderful stories we shall hear and tell from folks around the world. What wonderful music we shall listen to, play and sing, and dance to as we celebrate God's victory feast. Most of all, how full and perfect our love and joy shall become as we are gathered together in the holy presence of God. Every time we celebrate Holy Communion, we are given a foretaste of this victory feast to come. Holy Communion is a sign of our hope and deepest longing for that day when we shall participate in a more complete and perfect celebration with our LORD. A day when no one shall be left out, excluded, thirsty, hungry or alone. The day of perfect and holy communion with one another and our God.

The next picture, still on Mount Zion, describes God taking the initiative, God acting to destroy what the prophet calls a shroud and sheet covering all peoples and nations. The shroud and sheet here is a reference to our mortality. God is going to act by removing, destroying, wiping out once and for all our mortal, temporary nature. Then the prophet gives us a wonderful word-picture of how that is going to happen. God, says the prophet, "will swallow up death forever."

For us to grasp this image and appreciate the prophet's words, perhaps the following information will be helpful. According to Professor Ralph W. Klein: In Canaanite mythology death was personified as a god Mot.

Mot had an enormous mouth, one lip touched the sky, the other dragged on the earth, and Mot stretched out his tongue to the stars. Just as we talk about death as the grim reaper, our Canaanite ancestors talked about death as the great swallower.

But the promise is that the "swallower" will become the "swallowee"--swallowed up by no less than Yahweh [God] himself.²

As Christians, that is what we celebrate today on Easter Sunday. Christ has triumphed! Christ has won the victory over the powers of sin, evil and death. God, by raising Jesus from the dead has swallowed death the "swallowee." We do not have to be intimidated or so afraid of death that we cannot truly live. Death is no longer a big, bad monster threatening to devour us forever. No! Rather, death is defeated. The resurrection of Jesus is a sign for us that one day death shall be completely defeated—swallowed by God. We who believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and one day shall raise us can truly live without the fear of death. Only those who are not afraid of death are set free to live life to the fullest each day. Why? Because we trust that God's resurrection power will give us the life and blessings that we need each day.

Moving on to our next picture, the prophet sees God as a tender, loving Parent. In verse eight, we are promised that: "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." Truly such a picture is a sign of God's tenderness and love. Those of you who are parents have likely wiped away the tears of your crying child. Such a moment with your child is one of tender loving care. So too God shall do the same for you, me and every other member of his family.

No more shall we need to shed tears since all suffering, hurt and pain shall be removed. No more shall we suffer by being disgraced. No more shall we feel shame, or be dishonoured, or lack self-esteem. The tender, loving God shall remove all of those imperfections from us; all sin that

divides and destroys shall be removed. The abuse of power and authority; the injustices that favour the few because the many are oppressed shall all come to an end. Perfect justice and peace, mercy and love shall everywhere prevail among all of God's people.

A final picture shown to us by the prophet is one of worship involving an affirmation that after waiting on God, at the right time God has acted to usher in his salvation. Waiting can be difficult, especially if there is no hope for a better future. God's people have waited and, on that first Easter Sunday, centuries of hopes and dreams came into fulfillment. God acted mightily to raise Jesus from the dead. That saving action of God is the definitive sign for you, me, and the entire human race. The raising of Jesus on that first Easter Sunday is what gives all of us hope to live fully each day—trusting that God is at work in us, with us, and through us to bring about new life, resurrection life thanks to Jesus who said that he himself is the resurrection and the life. Yes, waiting is difficult in our instant world that expects—even demands immediate gratification. However, waiting in hope frees us to make the most of each day because we know that each day makes a difference, and in some way leads us closer to that time when we shall all be joined together to be glad and rejoice in God's salvation.

Until that day, we are glad and rejoice in an imperfect way as we participate in the sacrament of the altar and are given a foretaste of the feast to come—the feast when we too shall be raised from the dead and share in a resurrection like that of he who is the resurrection and the life. Who comes to give us the abundant life with a capital L! Amen.

1 Wm. J. Bausch, *A World Of Stories for Preachers and Teachers and all who love stories that move and challenge* (New London, CT & Dublin: Twenty-Third Publications & The Columba Press, Eighth Printing, 2007), pp. 329-330.

2 Ralph W. Klein, lectionary notes for Easter Day, at his website: <<http://prophetess.lstc.edu/~rklein/>>.