

Easter Sunday 2025

Isaiah, in Chapter 25, gives a picture of the mountain of the Lord on the last day: On this mount there will be a feast of rich food and wine and the Lord God will swallow up death forever – and the people will say “This is our God, we have waited for him.”

A beautiful picture of joy, and rest, and relief after long pilgrimages in the valley of the shadow of death. It will be the party of parties!

But what about after the party? What do we do with the rest of our time in the Kingdom?

Our text today, also from Isaiah, describes that. We might be thrown off by the times in there, talks of 100 years here, and 100 years there, woah, is God short-changing us? What about all that eternal life talk? But no, *if* one were to die at 100 it would be so young, so young! In that new creation. And the sinner, the ones against the Lord, here and now they live such long and prosperous lives! Not so there. Not so. That won't happen again.

No, he writes, the forgiven we will be like trees, and I can't help but think of the olive trees that Jesus, just on Thursday we remembered, knelt under to pray, and his disciples leaned on to sleep. There are some of those very trees that are still alive from that very first Holy Week! Ah! If they could tell us of that night... But Isaiah's point remains: year upon year and time upon time will stack up on that day when God will make all things new.

There will be that feast and celebration and then there will be this, from chapter 65, planting and eating, building and living. Who doesn't take pride in something they worked on and built and gets to enjoy? Who doesn't take joy in watching something grow and then eating it's fruit without fear of taxation, theft, or pests to destroy? This is life! Right? What is the meaning of life? To live! To be about the creation, joyfully! The birds fulfill their meaning as they sing and

fly. What of us? Why not to build, to plant, to feast, to share the love shown to us by our Creator? It's why he made us, that he might share his love. We, in life, can do the same.

But that's all hard to see in this brokenness isn't it? Right now Life is a struggle. There is anxiety, fear, depression, sickness, pain and strife. "God why don't you answer prayer!" We say in times of hurt and doubt – but there, in the New Creation, we will see fully how he answers and works for the good. "before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear." Even as now we can in the Cross and at the tomb that yes, even now, God still works for good, even if through suffering.

We look at the news and see so much death and destruction and all creation turning over. Not so on that day – not there, "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain."

The point is: On that day not only will all be made new, all will be made *right*.

We will be with the Lord, and we will live.

Sounds great doesn't it? And yes, this, of course, is all well and good... if its true. If it's not just the "opium of the masses" that people like me come around and give you as you die to make you feel better.

Paul says as much. "If in this life only," this broken one here, "we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." Because then we are selling a con. We are peddling fairy tales. And while Paschal's wager rightly points out that, we don't lose out on all that much if we are wrong, everyone else dies and stays dead too, Paul is pointing out that it's a sad life to live a lie.

A lie that someone got up from the dead. Now it is an amazing statement, isn't it? That a dead man rose. And we might be tempted to think that those ancient folk would believe anything,

“they were so dumb.” Really? As if because we know about wifi or open heart surgery, we are smarter than them? Could any of us alone, without the knowledge and equipment of so many others, hope to figure those things out on our own – since we are *so* smart? The ancient people weren’t stupid. They knew dead people didn’t get up. It’s why the disciples, when they hear the Word of the resurrection from the women, they think it’s a fairy tale!

If dead people got up all the time, according to them, it probably wouldn’t be so shocking, they probably wouldn’t have written it down, they probably wouldn’t have attributed it to the only One who can create life – God.

Paul who has seen the risen Lord, then does not entertain idle tales he says, “But, in fact,” not theory, fact, “Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

A firstfruit, implying that more comes after, more, much more to life. He goes first, we follow after, and could it be any other way? How could any of us step in front of him in the resurrection, we can’t rise on our own! He goes first, he will bring us after, to the mountain where death, that last enemy, is killed for good.

“But Paul you can’t just state something is a fact without providing some evidence!” We might protest. His evidence is that he saw the Lord with his own eyes. But “anyone could say that and make it up right?” (Even though there were others with him on that road to Damascus.)

Nevertheless, In a world full of people who swear they have a monopoly on truth, we might ask, as Pontius Pilate did, “What is truth?” Does it have to be on a camera for me to believe? But do we even believe all we see in videos on the internet now? You probably shouldn’t. Does it need to be a repeatable experiment to be true? If so, you shouldn’t believe anything much from

history. We can't repeat those battles and wars... And to be honest, what are we certain of? I think eggs are good for you again, right?

So what do we have then here today on easter? Lets rattle off a few: We have stones, that give testimony to very real places and very real people. You are free to travel and explore them.

We have writings, from an unbroken chain of disciples leading back through Irenaus, and Polycarp to John, to Jesus. We have the New Testament itself, with thousands of documents in languages we can still read. We have extrabiblical writings that attest to a historical Jesus crucified under Pilate. You are free to go read them.

We have evidence of disciples suffering persecution claiming the resurrection is true. And some will say, "People die for their religion all the time!" True, but how many of those have seen their leader die first? And then go on to die knowing he is a fraud and a liar... IF he didn't rise as he said he would. No, that's unique to Christianity. Cowards turned brave, why? If their leader was a liar...

We've talked of those before, but today, since our reading is from 1 Corinthians. I would like to bring up Paul, again. What would change this man from what he was? Just a vision and nothing else? But again, there were others on the road. But even if it was all in his head... then he is welcomed in with the Apostles? As if they wouldn't vet him first? But we might say, "well the apostles or early church made this legend of a resurrection and it grew like folk tales do overtime, and Paul just happened to hop on that train..." Perhaps, but you'd have to explain why he hopped on *so early*... Paul's letters are going out before some of the Gospels and that would mean this folk legend of a resurrection formed when people were still alive who witnessed the events! And even more, Paul's letters contain already formed creeds. In the very book we read

from today, in the very same chapter Paul writes, verses 3-5: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.” And if that creed was already formed when he wrote Corinthians or before his conversion, that means the “folk tale” got started very early. Because based on the death of St. Stephen and the Jerusalem persecution, he was likely converted in the AD 30s!

That’s early! And what we don’t have, are any writings, claiming a body was found or disputing the accounts of the Way, the early Christians, while we have unrefutable proof of this Way, this resurrection Christianity, spreading from Jerusalem – the place which would have the most evidence and witnesses to stop it (if it were untrue) but it spreads from there around the world.

Even to us. By accident? Or by a Risen Lord who still is alive and still works to save. That you, yes you, might be with him at a feast on the holy mountain, at a place where they neither hurt nor destroy, where there is life to live and joy to be had.

Jesus is alive. Death is dying. Rejoice this day. Yes there is brokenness around and in us still, but the Lord is faithful. And he will see us steadfast by his power and promises to this new day.

Amen.