

Isaiah 25:6-9 – “*Worth the Wait*”
Easter Day – March 31, 2024

Anticipation is generally a delightful, pleasurable, positive experience. We look forward to an event with eager expectation. Students may anticipate the end of the school year. Workers may anticipate their vacation. Those at the end of their working days may anticipate retirement, and – you probably see the next step in this logical progression – those in the later years of life (especially if they are suffering a debilitating illness) not only may, but should, anticipate everlasting life with their loving Lord. But really, we don’t only have to be on the far end of life’s chronological spectrum to have that anticipation. We can be healthy as well as critically ill. All of us, regardless of our age or life’s condition, can eagerly await everlasting life in the new Creation because of the perfect life, the sacrificial death, and the victorious resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ. That’s the message of Easter, and why this day and what Christ did is so important.

The prophet Isaiah gives us a picture of the glories of everlasting life. It’s a celebration. It’s a feast. It’s a total change for the better compared to life in this fallen world. But sadly, we don’t always realize that. As strange as it might sound, there are some people – perhaps even us, who sometimes do not eagerly anticipate what we confess in the Creeds of the Church – the resurrection of the body and life everlasting – brought about by the enduring Easter victory of Jesus. Let’s consider two questions in response to that: why is this so, and how can this lack of anticipation be overcome?

The opposite of anticipation is dread. While anticipation is eager expectation, and is related to hope and confidence, dread is a cousin to fear and anxiety; dread is a decided lack of confidence and hope. It turns anticipation on its head, making it distasteful instead of tasteful. To use the imagery of our Old Testament lesson, it’s like the feeling you might have of sitting down to a table of food that has been pulled out of the dumpster, not the sumptuous banquet that Isaiah describes.

We could relate it also to the Gospel account for today. One reason we can be confident in the truth of Holy Scripture is that it is brutally honest. If the inspired writers of God’s Word had been making this up or altering the actual events that occurred, they would have presented themselves in a better light. We’ve heard these last three days about the despicable actions of the disciples, those closest to our Savior. After our Lord’s apprehension in Gethsemane, they all fled. Judas had betrayed Him, and Peter- to his initial credit, was brave enough to follow the crowd into the courtyard, later melted under the pressure and denied His Lord three times. None of them understood what Jesus had told them time and again, that He would suffer and die, and then rise again on the third day. The women who came to the tomb were likewise not anticipating a risen Lord.

Could it be that people today, even us at times, lack an eager anticipation of life everlasting because we doubt the reality of the resurrection? Let’s hope not. None of us would ever say that. But while we probably wouldn’t question the Scriptural truth that Christ did bodily arise on the third day from the tomb, our sin is that we sometimes fail to appreciate the difference Christ’s resurrection makes in our life.

Christ's resurrection means that we set our minds on things above, not worldly things. It means that we live life here with an eternal perspective. We realize that this world is not our home. No matter how long we live, our years here are but a drop in the ocean of eternity. It means that we need no longer strive for our "best life now," for truly, the best is yet to come. It means that we don't grasp for material things and find our comfort in them. It means we delight in the blessings of forgiveness, peace and hope that Jesus gives. Remember what St. Paul said later in 1 Corinthians 15, "*If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. . . and you are still in your sins. . . If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.*" The fearful, denying, slow-to-believe disciples finally got it. It took a little time. Next week we'll hear of them on Easter evening gathering behind locked doors. But empowered by the Spirit of the resurrected Lord they then boldly carried the Gospel message into the corners of the world and were willing to suffer martyrdom.

Even if we don't face martyrdom, like them, we no longer need to fear death in any form. Certainly, we're willing to wait until Christ calls us home and we use whatever time He gives us in this world to witness and glorify His name, as we joyfully serve Him and our neighbor. But Christians have the confidence of knowing that when our life in this world ends, we will be forever with the Lord. It's not an "iffy" thing at all. We would naturally think that way if we falsely thought that our salvation depended on our works, but salvation is a matter of God's grace through faith in Jesus.

We know that when we die our soul goes forever to be with the Lord. That's wonderful, but that's not all there is. In the timelessness of eternity, it will be only a moment until the trumpet sounds, the dead will be raised, and we will be forever with the Lord in both body and soul. We're not spirits or angels floating around in eternity. We're humans, the crown of creation, who will inhabit a perfect world physically and spiritually. We will be with our Lord and like our Lord. Although our eternal relationships will be different than earthly ones, we will be with our loved ones who die in the faith, and we will forever rejoice with them in the presence of Jesus.

The banquet of which Isaiah speaks is not symbolic. We have every reason to believe it will be a feast of wonderful abundance. Jesus ate with His resurrected body. The irony is that we will feast but never be hungry. We'll never have any need. There will never be an item on the heavenly menu that doesn't suit us. Everything will be perfect.

So today I give you my last Easter homework assignment as your pastor. It's the same as I've given you on the other Easters and other All Saints days. Sometime today make a trip to the cemetery. Visit the grave of your loved ones, or the place where your body will lay until the return of Jesus. If you can't do that, get out a photo album. Look at the smiling faces of your loved ones and realize that you will be together again in Jesus. Look at a picture of yourself, perhaps a younger version of yourself. Realize that one day the signs of aging will be gone, along with all its associated aches and pains. You will have a perfect, glorified body. Truly, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting is something to always anticipate eagerly. And when it comes, we will certainly realize that it was worth the wait. And it will happen. It will certainly happen. Perhaps soon. How do we know this? Because Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.

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