

1 Corinthians 5:6–8
Easter
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
March 31, 2024

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia! Today is the highpoint of the year, the culmination of the church's liturgical calendar. From Advent and Christmas through Epiphany and Lent, everything is pointing to this day. From the rest of Easter to the Ascension, Pentecost, and the Trinity season, everything flows from the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is a day of joy, a day of triumph, the day of Resurrection! On this day, the LORD overcame death. He led us, His people, out of slavery to sin, death, and the Devil. He leads us to the promised land of eternal life, which has already begun for those who are in Christ Jesus. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Cor 5:17).

The resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday is so foundational that Christians immediately began setting apart Sunday, the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, as holy, because that's the day Jesus rose from the dead. In the book of Acts, the disciples emphasized Sunday over the Sabbath because Sunday is the day of new creation. When Jesus rose from the dead, something new had begun, a new life planned from eternity. That's why every Sunday is called a "little Easter." The Church continues gathering every Sunday in honor of our Lord's resurrection from the dead.

The Lord's Supper was a huge part of this celebration. From the book of Acts we know that the early Christians didn't just gather on Sundays. They gathered daily to break bread, that is, to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Daily turned into a few days a week, which in many places

turned into an every Sunday and festival day observance. The resurrection of our LORD affected everything the Christians did and every aspect of their life. Not a day went by that they didn't receive the Lord's gifts. And they continued celebrating the high festival of Easter every year. The emphasis on joy was so prevalent that Early Church fathers like Tertullian and Irenaeus mention a prohibition against kneeling for prayer and a prohibition against fasting during the Easter season. What is expected for the rest of the year is discarded during Easter. The joy of this season overshadows routine Christian disciplines. The life of the Christian is a life lived in the joy of Jesus's resurrection.

With all the emphasis on joy, it's interesting that our Epistle text from 1 Corinthians 5 begins with an admonishment: "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" This Epistle text is in the context of congregational discipline. Paul is getting on to the Corinthians for not dealing with sin in their midst, in this case, sexual immorality. Paul describes sin as leaven, as yeast—those single-celled microorganisms that feed on sugars and produce gasses to make a lump of dough rise that you can then bake in the oven for a warm, delicious bread. It takes just a little bit of yeast to leaven the entire lump of dough. It takes just a little bit of sin or false teaching to work its way through a local church. Examples abound.

This reference to unleavened bread is related to the Passover, which was always celebrated by the Jews along with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. When God was about to lead the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land, He commanded them to eat unleavened bread, bread baked without yeast. The primary reason for eating unleavened bread at the Passover was to save time. The people would leave in haste, so there wouldn't be enough time to let the bread rise. But yeast also became symbolic of sin and false teaching. The

feast of Unleavened Bread would be celebrated for seven days after the Passover. In a kind of spring cleaning, all the yeast would be removed from the home—anything that could leaven the loaf was removed. And anyone who did eat something made with yeast would be cut off from Israel. Leaven is a picture of sin and false teaching that infect the whole body. That's why Jesus says: "Beware of the leaven of the scribes and Pharisees" (Matthew 16:6).

"Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened." Paul is saying that in Jesus Christ you are already free from sin. When God looks at you in Jesus Christ, He sees His Son—completely spotless, unblemished, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. In Jesus Christ you have been acquitted of everything against you. All the charges have been dropped. All the leaven has been removed from the house. You are accounted righteous for the sake of Jesus Christ. You are already considered unleavened by God, which is then the basis for cleansing out the old leaven of malice and evil. During Lent, Christians work on mortifying the sinful flesh—holding ourselves back from so much that God gives us that we might learn to hold ourselves back from that which is forbidden. The time of fasting is over and a time of feasting has begun. This is not a time to return to our old, sinful ways, however, but a time to live in the joy of resurrection and new life given us in Jesus Christ. In Him you are declared sinless before the Father. You are a new lump, a new creation, that God is molding and baking into something glorious. Jesus is the finished product and you are being formed and re-formed into His perfect image.

Paul then says: "For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed." The Feast of Unleavened Bread began with the Passover, when the Passover Lamb was sacrificed. On Maundy Thursday the Lamb of God was betrayed into the hands of men. On Good Friday the Lamb of God was slaughtered. On Holy Saturday the Lamb of God rested in the tomb. And on

Easter Sunday, the Lamb of God rose victorious from the grave never to die again. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the Paschal Lamb of God whose blood sets us free to be a people for God.

In all the Romance languages, the languages derived from Latin, like Italian, Spanish, French, and Romanian, the word for Easter comes from the Greek word: “Pascha,” which comes directly from the Hebrew word for the Passover. And when Passover comes up in older translations of the Bible into German and English, it’s called Easter and Jesus is called the Easter Lamb (Coverdale). Easter is the true Passover to which all the earlier celebrations of Passover pointed. Jesus is the true Passover lamb, to whom all the other passover lambs pointed.

The lamb of God is victorious, which is why you often see the lamb pictured with a victory banner. The Lamb who was slain is alive again. In the book of Revelation, we see the Lamb of God reigning from the throne of God. John sees upon the throne a lamb standing as though it had been slain. Jesus still bears the marks of His crucifixion, which He would show His disciples after the resurrection. He is the passover lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8), whose sacrifice is meant for all people throughout history. His is a sacrifice of eternal weight and his is the eternal victory. To Him we and all Christians offer our praises. He is the Lamb who redeemed the sheep. He is the only sinless one, who reconciled sinners to the Father. Death and life contended, and life came out triumphant. Jesus, the Prince of Life, reigns immortal as the Lamb of God.

Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. So let us celebrate the festival not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. You have been ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb

without blemish or spot (1 Pet 1:18). After the Passover follows the Festival of Unleavened Bread. Jesus, the Passover Lamb has been slaughtered and made alive again. He has redeemed you and given you eternal life. Continue sweeping out the leaven of sin in your life by confessing your sins and by eating the Lamb's flesh and drinking His blood in the true Passover meal.

We celebrate the festival of Easter not just every year, but every Sunday, and everyday of our lives in sincerity and truth. Jesus has risen from the dead and gives new life to you today and every day. Live in that repentance and faith. Live in that joy of Easter now and always. No matter what comes your way, in Jesus Christ you have the hope of Resurrection from the dead. He has risen and you too shall arise. In Jesus Christ you are a new creation. Behold, the old has passed away and the new has come. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! We stand for the Offertory.