

Today is the great festival, Christians! Today Jesus rose from the dead. It is a day unlike any other day, a day which changed history forever. Jesus lives! What a joyous thing that is to say! Jesus lives never to die again. And that's what we celebrate on this Easter. So it's only natural for us to treat this day as something different, as something special. But Jesus' resurrection is not just something for today. It is something which changes our entire lives. Jesus lives, Christians, and our lives will never be the same again!

But what if they haven't changed? What if we continue in the old ways? What if the excitement of today fades and we find ourselves going back to what we once were? If that's the case, Christians, then it shows that we have misunderstood the point of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus did not rise so that we could continue in our sins. Jesus rose so that we would be changed. Jesus rose to set us free from sin forever.

But that's what the Corinthians didn't understand in our epistle reading for today. They didn't understand the point of Jesus' resurrection. And as a result of that, they were tolerating in their midst a very great sin. Because Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 5 that one of them had fallen into a very serious sexual sin. But the congregation wasn't sad about this. They weren't doing anything about it. At best, they were kind of indifferent towards it, saying it's not that big of a deal. But in reality, what had happened is that they had become arrogant, as Paul says. They were treating it as if it was no big deal at all. Because they thought it showed how great they were. It showed how spiritual they were. Jesus had come to them and had lifted them up to this very high place, so that they were above all of these earthly things. They didn't need to worry about these things, because they were superior, because they were better Christians. They were really living the Gospel, at least in their own minds. But because of it, they had fallen into a very terrible sin, one that needed to be removed from among them. Because they had misunderstood the point of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus didn't rise so that the Corinthians could continue in their sins. Jesus rose to set them free from sin. Jesus rose to make them holy.

And Christians, we too can suffer from this same temptation. We too can be tempted to misunderstand the point of Jesus' resurrection. We can see it as something other than what it is. For example, we might be tempted to say that "Jesus lives, and because he lives, my sins have been forgiven!" Which, of course, is true. But then we're tempted to say, "For that reason, Jesus doesn't care about this sin. For that reason, Jesus doesn't care that I'm doing this thing. Jesus is going to overlook it. He's going to forgive me anyway. And so I don't need to try to get rid of it. So Jesus doesn't care that I'm committing this sexual sin. Jesus doesn't care that I am not forgiving towards my neighbor who has hurt me. He's going to forgive me anyway." But Christians, if we think that way, we have misunderstood the point of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus did not rise so that we could continue in our sins. Jesus rose to set us free from our sins.

Or we might be tempted to say that "Jesus lives! He's forgiven me and made me into a Christian!" Which, of course, is true. But then we're tempted to say, "So there's no need to do what Jesus says. All these things aren't going to make me a Christian anyway. I can't save myself by what I'm doing, so I don't need to worry about it. I don't need to worry about prayer. I don't need to worry about church. I don't need to worry about the Word, because they aren't going to make me better anyway. Other people might need them, yes. But I don't. And for that reason, I can just ignore what Jesus has to say. So it's okay if I don't do this, because Jesus lives." But

Christians, that too misunderstands the point of why Jesus has risen. Jesus did not rise so that we could just ignore what he says. Jesus has risen to make us new. He has risen to make us like himself.

And to really drive home that point, Paul uses a metaphor in our reading for today, a metaphor of baking bread. Because in those days, of course, bread was more like sourdough. They didn't have yeast that they could pull out of the freezer in order to make a loaf of bread. And so what you did was you took part of the old loaf, part of the old dough, and you put it into the new. And that's how you got your bread. And that's how the cycle continued. On and on it went. So you had two batches of dough in mind here: the old one which is full of yeast, which is rising, and the new one, which is just dough. It doesn't have any kind of leaven in it yet. But even a very small piece, Paul says, of the old dough will be enough to make the new one start to rise. And the cycle will continue on and on.

And for this reason, Paul says, verse 6 in our reading: "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" And so, in this metaphor, the leaven, the yeast is sin. Because just as a little bit of yeast will cause the entire loaf to rise, so even the smallest amount of sin will infect the whole body. It will cause greater problems. And if we treat the resurrection, Christians, as an excuse for our sins, then that sin is only going to grow more and more. Instead of becoming the new loaf that Christ has made us to be, we become just like the old in every way, so that there is no difference between them. And the cycle goes on and on and on. How can we say, in that case, that we are different from the world? How can we say that, in that case, that we are living as we ought to as Christians? If our lives aren't any different from what we once were, then something needs to change. We must become new in Jesus Christ.

For that reason, Paul says, verse 7: "Cleanse out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." And so, using this metaphor of bread, Paul points back to Passover. And at Passover, the people were supposed to get rid of all of the leaven that was in their house. God says, for example, in Exodus 12: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses." Well, how did they do that? It wasn't like they just opened up the freezer and threw the yeast away. That's not how it worked. What they would do, Christians, is they would take that old loaf, that old dough, and throw it away. They would get rid of it, so that when they started to make bread after that, they had to start all over again. They had to create a new starter, a new loaf of bread. So there was no connection, then, to what came before. In the same way, Paul says, we are cleansing out sin. To throw it away, to get rid of it, to have nothing to do with it anymore. Because we are no longer connected to what we once were. We have become a new loaf in Jesus Christ.

Because Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Christ has died to stop the cycle. Christ has died to throw out the old loaf. Christ has died to set us free from sin. And because he lives, Christians, you have been changed forever. You are now a new loaf in him. You are unleavened. You are a flatbread of righteousness because of what Jesus has done for you. Jesus lives, and you are no longer what you once were.

For that reason, verse 8: "Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." We can see Easter now as a new beginning, as a time when the old is being thrown away, the leaven of malice and evil. Jesus has taken us out of that. That is no longer who we are. We have become something new, the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, because of what Jesus has made us to be. We are here today, Christians, because Jesus is alive! And we are who we are today, because Jesus is risen never to die again.

But not just today! Not just on Easter. Because Jesus' resurrection changes our entire life, so that we are celebrating this festival every day! We are celebrating Easter every day of our lives, because we are a new loaf in Jesus Christ. Jesus lives to throw out the old. Jesus lives to make you into something new. And when we realize that, Christians, we will see the point of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus lives and our lives will never be the same again!

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank you that you have forgiven us our sins in your Son, Jesus Christ, and made us into something new. We pray that you would help us always to follow after him to do what is pleasing in your sight. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.