

April 9, 2023

Easter Sunday

“RED”

Luke 22:19-20

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

Special Music: “Christ is Risen” Phil Wickham

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMX9CNgRJCM>



## **THE BREAD AND THE WINE**

**And Jesus broke the bread  
And having blessed it said  
Here is my body and my bones  
Broken with nails and jagged stones  
This is my body broken upon  
The cross, the instrument of my death**

**Then He took the cup of wine  
With just the hint of common brine  
And he blessed the wine, oh, so red  
Looking into our eyes and then he said  
This is my blood betokened and drawn  
which flows for you and all mankind.**

**At the time it all seemed metaphorical,  
Sophisticated high-brow allegorical,  
But, in truth, it was simply a reminder  
That sacrifice is often kinder  
And even more outspoken whereupon  
The truth we find in questions rhetorical**

**The story is simple to understand  
To save us all God had a plan  
A plan so very complex  
Yet so very simple in due respect  
In one bright moment the world awoke  
To the nature of God's love for man**

**On that day, the world ran red  
As our savaged savior slowly bled  
Rivers of His sacred blood  
Grace flowed like a mighty flood  
So many words left unspoken  
As His body broke and spirit fled**

**Three dark days within the grave  
Three dark days for Him to stave  
Off the prince of death  
And once again take in a breath  
The curse of death was finally broken  
And no longer held the people slave**

**With a groan the stone rolled back  
What once was red and then was black,  
Was now a bright and shimmering white,  
As Jesus stepped into the light.  
The Word of God was being spoken  
With tones that made the darkness crack.**

**The souls of people had been set free  
Through the faith of a mustard seed  
God's Son had come to empty death  
Of all its power in a single breath  
God's promise remained unbroken  
For He is alive. He is alive indeed.**

How do we find in ourselves the humility to come before our God on this most Holy of days without feeling guilt and shame. The last thing that God wants is for you to feel guilt and shame on Easter Morning when you should be celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We know that we are responsible but we also want to set aside those feelings so that we can celebrate with God, the fruit of His plan. You might think it is a strange, but when I need to come before God in moments like this day, a day of both sadness and joy, I turn to the words of David. Yes, it is wonderful to celebrate the joy of our risen savior, but I struggle with knowing that it was for us that He went through all that He did. If not for the ugliness of our sin, He would not have had to suffer to wash it away. How powerful the love of God for His children, that when we come before His throne on Easter, we can come, our red robes of guilt cast aside, and clothed instead in our white robes of redemption.

David's words in Psalm 51 speak to this transition, this restructuring of our soul. He reminds us that we need to come before God with the humility that brings proclamations of the righteousness of Christ, and His ability to cleanse our souls, rather than the affrontery of hubris that proclaims our worth in human terms. It is all about God's preformulated plan and His desire to do whatever it takes to bring us home to him. Listen to these words from Psalm 51. You've heard them before, but close your eyes and listen to them again.

**1 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness:  
According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my  
transgressions.**

**2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,**

**And cleanse me from my sin.**

**3 For I acknowledge my transgressions:**

**And my sin is ever before me.**

**4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight:**

**That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear  
when thou judgest.**

**5 Behold, I was shapen in iniquity;**

**And in sin did my mother conceive me.**

**6 Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts:**

**And in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.**

**7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:**

**Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.**

**8 Make me to hear joy and gladness;**

**That the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.**

**9 Hide thy face from my sins,**

**And blot out all mine iniquities.**

**10 Create in me a clean heart, O God;**

**And renew a right spirit within me.**

**11 Cast me not away from thy presence;**

**And take not thy holy spirit from me.**

**12 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation;**

**And uphold me with thy free spirit.**

- 13 Then will I teach transgressors thy ways;  
And sinners shall be converted unto thee.**
- 14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation:  
And my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.**
- 15 O Lord, open thou my lips;  
And my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.**
- 16 For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:  
Thou delightest not in burnt offering.**
- 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:  
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.**
- 18 Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion:  
Build thou the walls of Jerusalem.**
- 19 Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with  
burnt offering and whole burnt offering:  
Then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.**

**If we can't find that profound sense of awe as we kneel in humility before the Creator of the universe who was willing to send His son to die for us, then we are missing the point when we come to this altar. It isn't enough to celebrate the resurrection without understanding the crucifixion. It isn't enough to celebrate the redemption without understanding the sacrifice. It isn't enough to celebrate salvation without understanding the price of that salvation. And we can't understand the crucifixion without understanding that Jesus died on that cross**

for every soul, regardless of race, color, creed, gender, nature, sin, and belief. He did not ask questions about theology and religion before making the ultimate sacrifice for everyone. His death on the cross was an opportunity for every human soul to step into the kingdom of God, and it was never our purpose to decide who those souls were. To do so is to cheapen the grace Jesus bought and paid for with His blood. Our singular purpose was to remind everyone we meet about that sacrifice and how very much God loves each and every one of us.

“He is risen!” “He is risen, indeed!” These are beautiful words. Important words. Words passed down from generation to generation of believers. Words of greeting and joy for reminding us to never lose sight of our savior and His intent for us. A reminder that death is no longer end of our story, but the beginning. But, the words, “He is risen!” “He is risen, indeed” are not found in the Bible. Can truth exist outside of the Bible? There are many who don’t think so. And yet, on Easter Morning, they will greet each other with these words. “He is risen!” “He is risen, indeed.”

The Catholic Church, and by default, most denominations, refer to this precious greeting as the Paschal Greeting. It is believed to be based on Luke 24:34 which describes the two men who had walked with Jesus on the Road to Emmaus. They had returned to Jerusalem to find the eleven disciples and let them know what had happened on the road. **“It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.”**

An Eastern Orthodox tradition has Mary Magdalene addressing Emperor Tiberius in Rome, with the words, **“Christ is risen.”** From out of these moments

came a tradition where one Christian would greet another with what we now call the Paschal Greeting with three kisses on alternate cheeks. The greeting is well documented, and it is full of truth even if the actual wording is not found in the Bible. I, myself, am glad this tradition has survived all these centuries. But I do cry when I think about what may have been lost to circumstances and time over those same generations, simply because they are not recorded in the Bible.

As we continue to think about the colors of Easter, one might think that today's color probably should be white, not red. After all, today is the celebration of our risen Lord who appeared to Mary Magdalene wearing a brilliant white robe. The angels that appeared to others were also wearing brilliant white robes. This is a day of purity, redemption, the removal of the darkness of death, sins washed away, a renewed opportunity for everyone to reform their relationship with God. But without the red, there is no white.

Red is the color of the day for numerous reasons. Do you remember when the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt and they were told to paint lamb's blood on their doorposts so that the angel of death would know that they were of the chosen as he passed over Egypt bringing death to all the first born? Blood was a marker, a signifier. It said, "This household belongs to Yahweh. You cannot have them."

Through His death on the cross, Jesus painted His children with his blood to tell everyone that "This person belongs to Yahweh. You cannot have them." Through that blood our sins are removed, and we are joined with the Spirit of God. At that point the only question is, "Are we willing to accept that grace? Are



**we willing to accept that mercy? Are we willing to accept the hope that is offered only through the red blood of Jesus Christ?"**

**I spoke with a gentleman the other day who believes with all his heart that we are all our own God, that we are responsible for determining our own morals and our own behaviors in society, that we are the creators of our own heaven. Don't be angry with him. There are many like him. And there is some truth in what he had to say. I've known many atheists that are charitable, gracious, kind, and benevolent. Most of them believe that death is the end for them or that they have the ability to determine their own heaven. I respect their choice to disbelieve in the grace, mercy, hope, and love found in the message of Jesus Christ. I have often said how awesome it is that God created within us the ability for us to choose to not believe in him. What kind of a God does that? A God that loves us so much that He is willing to die for us to bring us home to Him.**

**Isaiah speaks to us in Isaiah 1:18 saying these words:**

**“Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the Lord, ‘though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.’”**

**Think about that. God wants us to reason with Him. He wants us to bring Him our questions. He wants to be a part of that conversation. He wants the opportunity to speak into our doubts and reservations. But, He still allows us to come to our own conclusions. We know we are sinners because we are red with sin. We are stained. We can't wash it off. Even non-believers realize that they**

are not perfect. Our very nature is sin. Our sinful natures cause us to stray, to wander away from the path that God has set before us. But as ugly as our sinful lives are, God can wash away those stains, and bring us back to our true path, if we will only let him.

Isaiah 64:6-9 puts it this way:

All of us have become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;  
we all shrivel up like a leaf,  
and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

No one calls on your name  
or strives to lay hold of you;  
for you have hidden your face from us  
and have given us over to our sins.

Yet you, Lord, are our Father.

We are the clay, you are the potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.

Do not be angry beyond measure, Lord;  
do not remember our sins forever.

Oh, look on us, we pray,  
for we are all your people.

**So, here we are on Easter Sunday morn, reflecting on how the stone was rolled away and Jesus has defeated death, and we find joy in that. Word is spreading quickly. The tomb is empty. As a church, we change the liturgical colors of Palm Sunday Red to Easter White. We search for meaning. We prepare our hearts and minds. We seek the joy of the Holy spirit. We shout, “Hallelujah! He is risen! He is risen indeed! What once was red has become white! What once was crimson has become as snow!” The angel is asking us why we are seeking the living among the dead? He is risen! He is risen indeed.**

**Each week, as we come to the table for Communion, we are reminded of all these things. Jesus gave us that moment to remember what was about to happen. “Do this always in remembrance of me.” We remember as a collective, as the Church Universal. As generations of God’s children sitting in reverence at this table, where everyone is welcome to hear and participate in the story of the life, the Crucifixion, the burial, and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. No greater story has ever been told.**

**And I tell you, without a doubt in my mind, He is risen. He is risen indeed!**

**God bless you all!**

**AMEN**

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