

Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey."

My family had the long-standing tradition of getting together over the weekend closest to the 4th of July. My sister from Texas would come home, whoever could make it would make it, and we would reconnect for a few days. There was always conversation, fun, laughter, and something else of great importance: great food. That was one of the great things of getting together.

When was the last time you celebrated a large family get together? Covid and age and miles have made it much harder to get together these last years. But, it is fun to get together, so we plan for it, save for it, and look forward to it.

I am delighted to see that many of you are gathered together this Easter, joining together not only with family members but with the Body of Christ. During our Lenten sermon series, *Promised Treasures*, we looked at how much God loves us by reaching out to touch us, not only through our ears with His Word, but also through our other physical senses like smelling, seeing, tasting, and feeling. We have touched ashes, salt, water, light, and wood. We have also tasted bread. And, today we taste milk and honey. When Israel longed for the food of the Promised Land, it was called the land of milk and honey. Families in the Bible often gathered for high feasts like Passover and Pentecost. Thousands of years later, we continue to celebrate feasts such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost.

Today, on this feast of feasts, we celebrate Jesus Christ conquering sin, death, hell, and the grave by His glorious resurrection from the dead. And through all of that, He promises you the ultimate prize, an eternal inheritance of heaven. St. Peter even calls it a new heaven and a new earth. In the Early Church, Easter Day was the first time newly baptized and instructed Christians ate and drank the Lord's Supper. When new Christians were formally welcomed into the Church, they were greeted, given a holy kiss, and were congratulated for being released from the slavery of sin to be free children of God. And, right before their first Communion when they received the body and blood of Jesus, they were first given a cup of water mixed with milk and honey. This reminded those Christians that whenever you partake of the Lord's Supper, you are also partaking in an eternal feast of the promised land of heaven.

That's why it's wonderful to be in worship on Easter. It's like a prodigal son returning to his waiting father where a rich feast is prepared. The prophet Isaiah pictures heaven for us as the most glorious time of feasting: "On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine" (Isaiah 25:6). That is the feast all of God's people will partake someday. The reason why you are invited to this glorious banquet today is because someone opened the door for you. That someone is Jesus Christ, your crucified Lord, who is not dead but is risen and victorious! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Jesus has once and for all destroyed the "covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations" (Isaiah 25:7). Jesus has swallowed up and eaten death forever by rising from the dead!

Heaven still awaits you, but heaven is never so far away that we cannot taste it. When someone confesses that they believe in Jesus Christ, they have already crossed over from death to life (see John 5:24). Further, you are never closer to your loved ones in heaven than when we gather here to have Christ's Supper. Why? Because we have crossed over from the river of death into life. When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, they were set free from the slavery and death of Egypt. Then, when they crossed over the Jordan River, they entered the Promised Land of milk and honey.

Dear friends, that is the sweetness of this joyous day and every Sunday we gather for worship. Whenever you enter into this nave as a baptized child of God, you have crossed out of death into life because Jesus conquered sin and death for you! *Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!* You've stepped out of your world and entered God's world. Every single one of us has our share of death, pain, and sin outside these walls. You have trials and anxieties, but soon all that falls short compared to what heaven will be. Heaven is your promised land. It is perfect and peaceful where the feast never ends. However, until we enter those eternal halls, we must live with the frailties of age, illness, and death. We live with broken and strained relationships. We live grieving a loved one who is not with us anymore. We live with job loss or a dissolved plan for education. We worry daily about family, home, or work. As a result, all of us long for rest because troubles plague us.

In our Old Testament reading, God told Moses through the burning bush that he would lead God's people out of slavery and into the Promised Land of milk and honey, Israel could not wait to enter it. But it was not long before they were sinful and rebellious. And even worse, they blamed both

God and Moses for their troubles. In their forty years of wandering in the wilderness, they did not like living in tents and moving whenever God told them to move. They were tired of the same food, longed for clean water, and wanted more variety. So they grumbled, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt to die here, Moses?” They were so angry that they complained to God that life was better in Egypt and they were ready to stone Moses.

Sometimes, life feels long, and it's easy to grow impatient. *Where can I find rest from this problem? Where can I find the strength to move forward?* It is at those times you need God's sweet milk and honey. Receive it where it is always offered: in God's Word and Sacraments. Life is often frustrating, and in my frustration, it is easy to think that I deserve more out of this life than what God has given me. When you do that, you not only rebel against God, you are telling God you are wiser than He is. Only one thing is needed, dear friend: the bread of life, Jesus Christ. Only He can feed your hungry soul in the wilderness as we await the promised land of heaven. Just as God gave Israel manna daily to survive in the wilderness, God still gives you the bread of life, Jesus. This Table provides a foretaste of heaven. Your journey in this world is not complete until you die or the Lord comes again. As you await the promised land of heaven, God promises to feed you every time you receive His Word and Sacrament.

Friends, family reunions are great, but they never last. But God's kingdom is eternal, and our ultimate victory is won. God offers you something to eat here that is far better than anything the world offers. Here, you taste the fruit of the Promised Land, milk and honey. Eat from heaven's Table now! *Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!* Your

risen Lord gives you His life-giving Word and feeds your hungry soul with His body and blood. Yes, go enjoy your Easter brunch and your Easter dinner with friends and family later, but remember nothing beats this feast of the promised land, giving you the foretaste of heaven.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.