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Easter Sunday (April 5, 2026) 2179
Our Fasting Gives Way to Feasting
Text: Zechariah 8:19-23

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Brothers and sisters, blessings in the name of our risen Savior on this glorious Easter morning!

Today is a day of feasting on eggs and sweet rolls, chocolates and jelly beans, ham and potatoes, and the love of family. Even better, we feast on the triumphant news of Christ's victory over death and the devil, over sin and hell, over despair and defeat. We linger over those savory statements of the angels: "He is not here; he has risen, just as he said" (Matthew 28:6).

But let's back up for a minute. Did you fast during Lent? I'm not talking about missing a meal because you were too busy or fasting intermittently to lose weight or because you are preparing for a medical test. I'm talking about the ancient spiritual discipline of fasting.

God commanded the Israelites to abstain from food just once a year: on the Great Day of Atonement, when fasting showed the people's sorrow over sin. But voluntary fasting was common. David fasted as he pleaded with the Lord for the life of his infant son. Esther asked her fellow Jews in Persia's capital to fast while she prepared to ask King Xerxes to spare all the Jews in the country. Jesus, who once fasted for 40 days in the wilderness, spoke about fasting as if it were a widely observed custom. In Acts, we read that the believers at Antioch fasted and prayed for God's favor before they sent Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey.

Voluntary fasting as a spiritual discipline is less popular today. Maybe it should be more common. It can be used appropriately to express remorse over sin, to call on God's help, to focus on devotional time, or to remind us of all that Jesus freely gave up for us. In the catechism, Martin Luther acknowledges that "fasting . . . may serve a good purpose" in preparing one's heart to receive the Lord's Supper. Some may abstain from a daily meal or two; others may choose to fast from sweets or alcohol or television or social media.

But after such a period of self-denial, we anticipate a time of celebration. Imagine how Jesus looked forward to the end of his 40-day fast in the wilderness! We have looked forward to the end of the 40 days of Lent, and today—Resurrection Day—our fasting gives way to feasting!

Since Ash Wednesday we have been listening to Zechariah, the Holy Week Prophet. None of his prophecies directly foretell the Messiah's resurrection, but today we will hear the prophet predict that fasting will give way to feasting. God's people would be so joyful that many nonbelievers would follow the believers in the hope of attaining the Lord's blessing.

Let us hear the Word of God from Zechariah 8:19-23:

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months will become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah. Therefore love truth and peace."

This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going.’ And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat him.”

This is what the Lord Almighty says: “In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.’”

Even if you didn’t give up any food or activity during Lent, it was still a time of figurative fasting, a time to lament that it was “my fault, my own fault, my own grievous fault” that caused Jesus’ torture and torment. You confessed that you have not always loved truth and peace, that you deserve to be deprived of God’s presence for all eternity. Yet it was Jesus who was deprived of his Father’s presence on that awful cross.

Lent is also a time to rejoice that the prophecies have been fulfilled, that the world has been reconciled to God, that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). We know that is true because of Easter!

This is what the Lord Almighty says: “The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months will become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah. Therefore love truth and peace.”

The fasting has ended; let the feasting begin! Easter is a joyful and glad occasion and a happy festival for God’s people, because Jesus’ work is complete. “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Romans 4:25). The resurrection is God’s confirmation to the world that our sins were left buried in Christ’s tomb, that we are raised with Christ to a new life. Our new nature loves truth and peace. The truth is, “he is not here; he has risen, just as he said” (Matthew 28:6). The peace is, we have a restored relationship with God.

That is why you rolled out of bed early this morning to see the lilies and the white paraments and to hear the return of “Alleluia!” and to shout, “I know that my Redeemer lives!” Don’t be shy. Let your joy be evident to everyone! Zechariah writes:

This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going.’ And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat him.”

Many of you invited family and friends to Easter worship. Maybe you didn’t say, “Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty.” But you did say, “I myself am going.” Even if the folks you invited didn’t show up today, “many peoples and powerful nations” have come “to seek the Lord Almighty” on this triumphant day. They have learned that the barriers to the throne of grace are removed. They are eager “to entreat him,” because if Jesus has defeated death, he can surely provide whatever they need.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: “In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.’”

What a testimony to God’s working among his people! People from all languages and nations would envy what the Jews had and would beg to see this God and his wonders for themselves, because they have “heard that God is with” them.

Yes, God is with you, Mary Magdalene, as you weep outside the tomb until you hear Rabboni call your name. God is with you, apostles, as you hide behind locked doors until you hear your Master say, “Peace be with you!” God is with you, Emmaus disciples, as you lament the death of the one you hoped would redeem Israel until you hear the Redeemer explain what was said in all the Scriptures about himself. God is with you, eyewitnesses, as the power of the resurrection overrides your fear and you are emboldened to risk your lives to proclaim that truth.

And God is with you, persecuted Christians, as you hold tightly to your faith under pressure. God is with you, suffering Christians, as you wince with pain and weep with grief. God is with you, faithful Christians, as you seek to defend the truth in a hostile world. God is with you, moms and dads, as you equip your children for life in a world that hides so many spiritual land mines.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: “In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.’”

Is your confidence showing? As you confront the obstacles in a dying world with a living Savior, others are taking note. So live your faith out loud! Live it so loud that the people around you are envious of your joy. Make church attendance so regular that when your neighbors see your car in the driveway on Sunday, they will wonder if you’re sick. And when they ask why your life seems so put together while theirs is falling apart, you will tell them about the God who says:

“Do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)

Tell them about your faith in a living Savior, the faith that allows you to say with confidence:

Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)

On Easter, the fasting of that fatal Friday gave way to feasting for Jesus' disciples. On Easter, the fasting of Lent gives way to feasting for us. Don't hold back! Fill your heart and stuff your soul with the truth and triumph of the resurrection. Fill your life and stuff your schedule with satisfying service to your Savior and your neighbor. Fill your friends and stuff their curious minds by showing them the power of the living Lord in your life.

And don't be surprised if one or two or ten people take hold of you by the hem of your clothing and say, "Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you."

May our good and gracious God be with each of you on this Feast of victory, Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord. Amen.