

Rejoice, This Day, for the Table is Bountifully Spread

April 8, 2021 Scott Gunn

First and last alike, receive your reward. Rich and poor, rejoice together! Conscientious and lazy, celebrate the day! You who have kept the fast, and you who have not, rejoice, this day, for the table is bountifully spread! Feast royally, for the calf is fatted. Let no one go away hungry. Partake, all, of the banquet of faith. —From the Easter Sermon of St. John Chrysostom (c. 4th century)

The first Episcopal church I attended had a lovely custom of reading Saint John Chrysostom's brilliant Easter Sermon as the sermon at the Great Vigil of Easter. I've grown to love this short, fiery sermon because I think it says just about everything we need to hear as we begin our celebrations of Easter.

Easter is for everyone. Whether you have carefully kept the Lenten fast this year (and every previous year of your life) or you just stepped into a church for the first time, Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead for you. Death is defeated, and sin is vanquished for all of us.

I also love the reminder within the sermon that Easter is not some kind of cosmic party trick in which a dead person resuscitates and that's that. In fact, Jesus's death and resurrection shows us that God's love is for the whole creation. There is no one and no circumstance that is beyond the reach of God's love.

Even hell is redeemed. We don't talk about this much, but the scriptures tell us that Jesus offered salvation to those who were in hell while he was dead. This harrowing of hell shows the utter defeat of Satan and evil.

Hell was in an uproar because it was done away with. It was in an uproar because it is mocked. It was in an uproar, for it is destroyed. It is in an uproar, for it is annihilated. It is in an uproar, for it is now made captive.

Hell took a body, and discovered God. It took earth, and encountered Heaven. It took what it saw, and was overcome by what it did not see.

If Jesus can do that, he can certainly love me and save me when I mess up. And he loves you and saves you when you are messed up, too.

Easter changes everything. We don't have to fear evil and death, because we know that God's love and life are triumphant.

Christ gives life to the dead, and he gives life to the living. He offers eternal life to all.