

## Days of Wonder

If you happened to notice the heading in today's bulletin (which I'm pretty sure you didn't) you would have noticed that today is the third Sunday of Easter. And if you noticed that (which I'm pretty sure you didn't) you may have wondered about it. Actually Peggy Gensamer, who has been volunteering to help with the bulletin did notice and asked me about it. The idea given by this heading is that Easter is not over at the end of Easter Sunday. According to the church calendar, the "Sundays of Easter" will continue until Pentecost Sunday, which this year will be on May 31st. Sometimes this whole period is also referred to as "days of Easter" or "Eastertide." But, once again, the idea is that Easter continues. The good news of Jesus' victory over sin and death is more than can be comprehended or celebrated on just one day. We are given 50 days to concentrate on Easter, and even beyond that; every Sunday throughout the year when we gather "on the first day of the week," is a commemoration of Easter.

There are people, of course, who criticize most Christians for breaking or corrupting the Commandment to remember the Sabbath day. They point out that the Jewish Sabbath was Saturday, not Sunday. Those who are really up on this, will point out that Sabbath actually runs from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday, and that that is when we should be worshipping. But it is no accident that the vast majority of Christians hold their main worship service on Sunday morning. Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the crowning moment of everything we believe as Christians. Paul goes so far as to say that those who confess with their mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in their hearts that God raised Him from the dead will be saved. Since Jesus sacrificed His life for us on the cross and then took it up again in the Resurrection, all who believe in Him have passed from death to life. We have also passed from Old Covenant law to New Covenant grace. And, while we can worship God anytime, worshipping Him on Sunday morning is an intentional witness that this is so. We are no longer bound by the law of sin and death. We are Easter people, set free from bondage to the law and from the tyranny of death by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's all right if you want to say "**Hallelujah!**"

So, we are now in the days of Easter, abiding in Eastertide. I want to suggest another designation for this period of time from Easter to Pentecost: I think a fitting and more descriptive title for these days would be "days of wonder." Think what the first disciples of Jesus were going through! Everything they thought they knew about life and death had been torn to pieces, only to be reassembled in a new and wondrous form.

First, Jesus died and left them feeling that all had been lost. All the dreams He had inspired seemed buried with Him in the garden tomb. But, then, all of a sudden the tomb was empty, the body gone, and His followers were invited to dream again and to dream larger than before. These were days of wonder as the resurrected Jesus appeared here and then there. These were days of wonder as He taught them about the kingdom and promised them another Comforter who was to come. These were days of wonder as the full measure of what He had done for them began to take shape before them. These were days of wonder as they felt His continued love for them, after their failure, and as they drank in His acceptance and His forgiveness.

I think these are meant to be days of wonder for you and me as well. This is time for us to seek the Lord, knowing that He is alive from the dead and even now able to meet us and to surprise us with His presence. Though we may not be able to see Him with our eyes or hear Him with our ears, we can certainly encounter Him in our thoughts, in our meditations upon His word, in our prayers, in worship, and in the midst of our circumstances. He has many many ways to make Himself known to

us; it is for us to be on the look out, to seek Him, to be observant and open, to ask Him to open our hearts to His presence in us and among us. This past Wednesday morning I encountered the Lord in a dream. I woke up that morning with songs of worship pulsing through my mind. These are days when we should invite and expect the Lord to make His living presence felt and known.

Another experience in which I believe I encountered the Lord this past week was given in my meditation upon His word. I was thinking about the verses in our Scripture we read for this morning. Mark 14:3-4 say, "While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, 'Why this waste of perfume?'" Those complaining go on to suggest a more sensible use of the perfume; it could have been sold and the money given to the poor. It was a true but hollow complaint. Yes, the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor, but that is not what was in their hearts.

The tip-off to this is found in verse 14 where Mark tells us, "Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them." Judas, whom John tells us was a thief and liked to help himself from the communal money bag carried by the disciples, was so incensed by this "waste" of the perfume, that he chose this time to betray Jesus to his enemies. This is also supported by Jesus' comment in verse 7: "You can help the poor anytime you want." Jesus is not denying that helping the poor is a good thing--even a necessary thing for His followers do--but there is something greater and deeper that needs to be kept and done first.

The woman with the jar of perfume, no doubt her most precious possession and most likely her only retirement fund, empties it on Jesus. Does she know that she is anointing His body for death? I doubt that. Has Jesus blessed her, forgiven her, delivered her from demons? Yes, I believe He has touched her before she touches Him. Her love is unconditional, extravagant and outrageous, even scandalous. Judas and some others thought it obscene, but Jesus receives it and defends her before her accusers. Jesus says, "Leave her alone; she has done a beautiful thing for me." "Her act will go down in history as a memorial to Her." "She has anointed my body in preparation for my burial."

There can be no doubt about this: God delights in our worship. When we pull out all the stops and go beyond all our inhibitions and give Him our best and our all, He rejoices and He could not be more pleased. He knows in that moment that we finally get it. He knows then that we understand that we must give up our lives in order to gain them. He knows then that we finally love the Lord our God with all our hearts and with all our minds and with all our strength. When we come to this level of devotion God knows we are finally positioned to love Him and serve our neighbors.

But even in all of this there is nothing really new. I've read this story before many times and have seen these things before. I have understood the story on this level before. But what came to me this past week and left me with a sense of wonder, is that this woman's ministry to Jesus stands as a dramatic portrayal and an accurate reflection of what Jesus has done for us. He says, "this is my body broken for you." "this is my blood of the covenant poured out for you." Her anointing portrays His ministry. He is the flask of the rarest and most costly of all perfumes. He offers Himself to be broken and poured out for you and me. He allows Himself to be broken open so that the fragrance of His love will be breathed in by us and will cling to us so that we can share it with all the world.

The offering of the perfume is about the sincere and deep devotion of an unnamed woman and we remember her today, even as Jesus said we would. But more than that, the offering of the perfume is about Jesus and what He has done and does for you and me. It's Him pouring Himself

out for us.

One of my favorite Easter songs is "He's Alive," as sung by Don Francisco. Let's take a moment now to receive the message of Easter as offered in this song:

You can find the lyrics at <http://www.risa.co.uk/sla/song.php?songid=18001> or view the video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbSnk1R31vg>.

Yes, He poured Himself out in death but He is alive. He's alive to forgive us all our sins. He's alive to heal our wounds and to deliver us from every bondage. He's alive. Perhaps you know this morning that there are sins in your life that need forgiven. Perhaps there are wounds that need healing. Perhaps there are places where Satan has you bound and you desire very much to be set free. If you believe Jesus is alive and give your life to Him in prayer, He will forgive; He will heal wounds; He will bring you freedom. Today can be a day of wonder for you.