

“The Passover is at Hand”

St. John tells us that “the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.” It’s Passover time – and the people of God should have had the blood of the Lamb and the Lord’s deliverance first and foremost on their minds.

But they were too busy to notice. Too busy going to Temple, buying and selling, offering the prescribed sacrifices. For them, worship was a Law thing – checking the boxes – focused on what needed to be done to fulfill the Third Commandment – and missing out on the Lord their God who had come to deliver them.

So zealous is Jesus for the true worship of God that He drives out of the Temple everything that gets in the way of what His Father desires for His people in the Third Commandment.

The Temple is the place of sacrifice – but there’s nothing left – except Jesus. This is the worship that God desires – a faith that trusts in the blood of Jesus Christ to atone for sin, to break the chains that bind, to deliver from slavery to sin and death.

In other words, worship is primarily Gospel – the “good news” of Christ’s redemption and deliverance.

We have the same problem as those folks in the Temple – we see the Third Commandment as only Law, and miss out on the Gospel.

We think in terms of – what do I have to do? How many times do I have to go to church? If I do my devotions, is that enough to replace the Divine Service? That is a Law focus – on what I am doing – not on what God is doing.

Did you notice the introduction to the Ten Commandments in our reading from Exodus 20? “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” That’s Gospel – focusing faith on what the Lord has done.

You might also have noticed that the Lord has a lot to say about the Third Commandment. The Sabbath day is holy, “set apart” – a time set aside for God to do His work on you – giving you Sabbath – the rest that only He can give to your soul.

Jesus, the Passover Lamb, sheds His blood so that death passes over you – giving you rest from your harsh taskmasters – giving you sabbath from the guilt and shame of your sin – rest from the fear of death – and restoring you to your Father in heaven.

The default setting for our sinful nature is the Law of God, without His Gospel – and God says that is foolishness. “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

That’s God repenting you – destroying your Law approach to worship. That’s God resurrecting you to live as a new man – to live by faith in Christ. Instead of the notion that worship is something required of me, something I do for God – it is Divine Service, the “good news” that “the Lord your God” comes to deliver you from the slavery of the Law – to a faith that looks to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ alone for your rest.

Are you too busy for God’s service to you? Is your calendar too full to set aside time for His Sabbath? Are you so busy playing on the weekends that you have to go back to work to get some rest? Do you keep telling yourself that – after basketball season, after tax season, after calving season – I’ll get back to going to church?

What would happen if you treated your beloved that way? “I’m too busy to spend time with you.” Not listening to her, ignoring him – putting other things before them? How much more do we arouse the anger of the Lord our God when we have other priorities?

Repenting of failing to love the Lord your God with your whole heart – He forgives you for Jesus’ sake – and by His forgiveness the new man is resurrected as one who cannot live without His Divine Service. Nothing will come before my God, for I daily sin much and need His forgiveness – His Word to guide me and give me peace.

“The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” The blood of Jesus is the power of God which cleanses you from all your iniquity. Christ is the wisdom of God which leads you to “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.”

It's holy for you – set apart – God above all things for you and your family. Fathers, you guide your family in the way of the Lord by saying – this is the way it's going to be – don't make any other plans – put it in your Google calendar (with plenty of reminders) – we're going to church!

And when they ask “why?” – tell them, because “the Passover is at hand.” Christ is coming to meet us in His Supper – His blood poured out in Holy Baptism delivering us from death – freeing us from the bondage of our “too busy calendars” – so that we might have rest.

The world may say that going to church is folly, and a waste of time – they may despise the water, bread, wine, and words from the mouth of a man as lowly things – but God has chosen them as the means by which He promises to be at work for you – and the wisdom of faith says, they are the power of God for our salvation.

Rest in that Gospel folks. God loved you so much that He gave His Son to die for you. He loves you so much that He comes to be with you – to take away all that burdens you – to fill you with His forgiveness.

And just as Jesus is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity – so He will resurrect your body on the Last Day, so that you may rest with Him for all eternity. This is most certainly true. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.