

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Easter, April 8, 2012

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 199, 205, 191, 193, 210.

Lessons: Isaiah 52:13-52:12, Romans 3:20-26, John 20:1-18.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 53:10-12.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Wait a minute, pastor. Isn't today Easter? So why are you reading from Isaiah, and talking about Jesus suffering? Isn't Easter supposed to be about the empty grave, and how Jesus rose from the dead?

Or maybe like some people think, isn't Easter about new clothes and candy and Easter eggs and things like that?

Well, yes, Easter is about the empty tomb. And No, Easter isn't all about new clothes and Easter baskets and candy and things like that.

But we need to remember how that grave got to be empty. And we need to remember why that grave got to be empty.

The whole Easter story starts a long, long time ago, when God created man and put Adam and Eve into a perfect garden. But Eve and Adam disobeyed God. And every human being since then has been disobeying God. That's why we get to celebrate Easter.

But God found a way to make up for man's disobedience. That's how we get to celebrate Easter. Yes, the Easter message is a message of resurrection:

JESUS' GRAVE IS EMPTY

- 1. How it happened.**
- 2. Why it happened.**

It is true that these verses tell us about the sufferings of the Servant of the Lord, who is plainly Jesus Christ. But in a greater measure it foretells the glory that will follow these sufferings.

He subjected himself to the wages of sin, that is, to death, even though he himself was sinless. He permitted himself to be identified with sinners, and offered himself to intercede with God for sinners.

"Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied."

We – every one of us – should have suffered and been punished for our sins. But God wanted Jesus to suffer in our place. The Lord God made Jesus pay for our sins. This had to happen so that we can go to heaven. If we had not lived a perfect life, like Jesus did, there is no way we could have gone to heaven. If someone had not suffered for the sins of all humans, no one could have gone to heaven.

This was all part of God's great plan, because ***"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*** (John 3:16)

During our special Lenten services we have been talking about how Jesus suffered and died, starting with the words of Isaiah the prophet in chapters 52 and 53. Those verses speak of the Servant of the Lord. Today we celebrate the end of all that. In our Holy Week worship services you heard that Jesus was buried because he was dead and he had said ***"it is finished"***. (John 19:30) Now that suffering and the death that it led

to are all over and done with. Jesus was crushed and he suffered. Through that, ***“the LORD makes his life a guilt offering”***.

A guilt offering is one of several different kinds of offerings or sacrifices demanded by God from his Old Testament people, the Jews. A guilt offering offers something of value as a compensation or recompense for something the worshiper had withheld from God. The offering does not remove the wrong but rather it compensates for it. So the plan of the Lord called for his servant to offer his life as satisfaction or compensation for the guilt of all humanity. In these verses we see again the vicarious atonement, this time from God's perspective instead of from our point of view. The Lord makes his servant's life, sufferings, and death a guilt offering. The servant not only atones for sin but he also makes restitution to God.

Jesus Christ is that Servant of God.

Jesus was dead, cut off from the land of the living. But now we read that he sees his offspring, his descendents. ***“He will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.”*** Jesus had fathered no children in an earthly sense. Then who are his descendents, his offspring? They are the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, they are all believers. Scripture tells believers: ***“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”*** (Galatians 3:26). Those who believe – they become his children. How can a dead man see his offspring? The answer is in the Scriptures. He will rise from the dead. His days will be prolonged. And not only does he live, but ***“the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.”***

“He will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.” Here the mystery of the treatment accorded by God to the sinless Servant is set forth. His sufferings, his bruises, were divinely inflicted; He bore the sins and sicknesses of mankind by the specific counsel and foreknowledge of God.

His very soul, his life, was offered as a vicarious guilt offering, in voluntary surrender, a complete ransom. But now comes the fruit. The Servant, having died, now sees his offspring, his spiritual children, born to him as the result of the Gospel-message. Having died, He prolongs his days, for now he lives forevermore.

Because of our sin, we were condemned to eternal damnation. But our redemption is a reality. God planned it and then carried out the plan through his Servant, Jesus. He did it by punishing his Son. This punishment of Jesus Christ, the Servant of the Lord, is all the Lord's doing. Bringing him back to life after being dead is also all the Lord's doing.

God is now satisfied that sin has been paid for. He made the soul of his one and only Son to be the perfect guilt offering for all the sins of the world. It was enough. No further payment needs to be made for sins.

Think of the wonderful consequences of that guilt offering for us sinners! ***“My righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities”***. What wonderful comfort for us! The servant is righteous, good, perfect. He has no sin. He is innocent and a perfect match to the will of God and the mind of God. He committed no sin, no iniquity no transgression. He was innocent. He is exactly what was required: a sinless human.

Because of this God declared all men righteous and “not guilty”. To declare someone just or righteous, that is, to acquit someone, is a courtroom decree. God made this declaration, whether or not many respond to it. ***“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”*** (Ephesians 2:8-9.)

God did it. He did it all. His decree of “not guilty” does not depend on any human action. It is an act of God's independent and free love. Humans are helpless and worthless because of their sins. ***“All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”*** (Romans 3:12) But one Righteous One has changed that. And that Righteous One is Jesus Christ, the Servant of the Lord.

“Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

This really shows the triumphant victory of the servant of the Lord. He has achieved a marvelous victory. He has overcome sin, death, and hell. With that victory comes the spoils of the war, the results of his efforts. His work has been so successful that the Lord will grant him an inheritance. Mankind, including the powerful and the weak are the spoils, that is, the fruits of the victory won back from sin, death, and the devil.

The Hebrew words **“great”** and **“strong”** can also mean “numerous” or “many”. The servant’s work has bought back or redeemed many from the bondage of sin and death. And who are those “many”? They are the “many” who have sinned and fallen short of God’s commands. And how many is that? All men. ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** (Romans 3:23)

“After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.” Someone who can see the light of life and be satisfied is not someone who is dead!

Those whom the servant has redeemed with his suffering and death will be his eternal portion of an inheritance. The servant claims us by his work. We, as believers, are his. And why? What is the reason? The servant poured out his life in death and was counted with sinners, treated as if he were one of them, which he was not. Jesus, as the great high Priest, sacrificed himself for the sins of his people and still intercedes for them before the throne of grace.

Each of us must remember that **I** am among the transgressors, the sinners for whom the servant has suffered and given his life. So is everyone who reads these words or hears them. God has done everything to reconcile us to himself. He has redeemed us by grace, that is, by his undeserved goodness and mercy. No other reconciliation exists. Those who believe receive all that God has done. Those who do not believe reject it. Unbelievers obviously have decided they think they have a better way to remove sin and win God’s favor. But that is just plain arrogance and pride. Those who reject God’s answer must pay the penalty for accepting and believing an answer that cannot save. That penalty is eternal damnation, and the empty grave is useless to them.

In Genesis chapter 3, God promised that someone would come to crush Satan’s head. Who would that be? Isaiah provides a clear answer: the Servant of the Lord. And that Servant of the Lord is Jesus Christ, the one who ***“will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*** Isaiah 9:6.

The fact that he poured out his life in death, that he bore the sins of mankind, is now the everlasting foundation of his work as our advocate or mediator or intercessor with the Father. On the basis of the fact that he paid for all our sins he makes continual intercession for us, for the sins we continue to commit. Such is Christ’s work of vicarious atonement, as it was preached to the believers of the Old Testament in the words of our text, and as we now know it to have been fulfilled.

The Redeemer shall have offspring, descendants to serve him and to carry his name. True believers are the offspring of Christ. The Father gave them to Jesus. He died to purchase and purify them to himself. He died to do this. Before his sufferings and death Jesus had told his disciples: ***“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”*** (John 12:23-24) Jesus died. He was buried, just as we bury a kernel of wheat or any other seed so that it may bring forth fruit. Jesus’ death and burial bring much fruit to life. He rose from the dead and left the tomb empty. Because of that, everyone who believes in him shall have eternal life. Believers are the fruit of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Because of the resurrection and empty grave of Jesus, God’s power and the power of his Servant are placed side by side, gathering men through the proclamation of the Gospel. Humble ones and mighty ones, all are the same under sin, and the Gospel truth is offered to all.

Jesus is living today to see his offspring – you who believe! That’s the message of Easter applied to your life from the prophet Isaiah. Christ’s children have a living Father, and because he lives they shall live also, for he is their life. Though he died, he rose again, and he did not leave his children orphans, but gave them the blessing, the inheritance of sons.

Yes, Jesus’ grave is empty. It is empty because he had to die for your sins. It happened because God loves you and wants to give you eternal life! Amen.