
THE ICING ON THE CAKE

A Sunday School teacher asked his class to tell what Easter is all about.

- A child quickly raised her hand and said, "Easter is when we get a green tree and bring it into our home to decorate. Then everyone gets presents."
 - The teacher said, "I think that's Christmas."
- A little boy piped up, "Easter is when we eat turkey and stuffing and pie, and everybody tells what they are thankful for."
 - "No," the teacher replied, "that's Thanksgiving."
- Then a little girl said, "I know. Easter is when after JESUS was crucified on a cross and died, they put His body in a tomb."
 - "Then after three days, JESUS comes out and if HE sees HIS shadow, there will be six more weeks of winter."

Sometimes, I think Easter can get a bit confusing.

- What does a bunny have to do with Easter?
 - Certainly, the egg can represent a tomb with a new born chick reminding us of the new life of the resurrection.
 - But what does an Easter Bunny, or eggs filled with candy, or egg hunts have to do with Easter?
- And for that matter, do we really grasp the full meaning of this special day for us as believers?
- Does this one special day have any real meaning once Easter brunch is over?
 - Do we come to this place with a distorted focus on this one day in the entire church year?
 - Certainly, Easter Sunday is one of the most important of all our worship experiences,
 - but do we really see this day within the bigger picture of history and perhaps of greater importance, within the fullness of our own lives?
 - Perhaps it would help us to think about Easter as the icing on the cake.

How many of you like icing?

- How about when you were younger?
 - Many of us liked to steal a finger of icing off the cake when no one was looking.
 - A lot of us used to love to lick the bowl and the spoon once the icing was spread on the cake?

Over the years, though, most of us have learned how much better the icing is when it comes spread on the cake:

- the cake that gives the icing shape;
- the cake that compliments the flavor of the icing;
- the cake that, in a sense, keeps us from overdoing the icing.
 - The truth is, if we're going to have the icing, we really do need the cake.

Now some of you may be sitting there asking yourselves, "What is he talking about?"

- "What has cake and icing got to do with Easter?"

Well, I'm glad you asked.

- Let me see if I can make things a bit clearer.
- As I said before, Easter is the icing on the cake,
 - but the cake on which the icing is spread is the crucifixion of JESUS CHRIST.

These past few days, those of you who were present in this house of worship heard of our LORD'S passion:

- of His last supper with His disciples,
- of His betrayal and arrest,
- of His torture and suffering at the hands of the priests and the Romans,
- and of His excruciating and humiliating death on the cross.

This is the cake of which I am speaking.

- It is these events that form Holy Week,
 - and give the icing of Easter its shape and its flavor.
- Yet how many more have chosen to come to taste only the icing on the cake?
 - How many of us have avoided the previous three days of suffering and pain, and come just for this day of celebration and praise?

An article several years ago in USA Today shared that Easter is the most highly attended worship service in the entire year.

- Normally, on any given Sunday, worship attendance in most congregations is about 30-35% of the total church membership.
- But on this one day of the year, worship attendance jumps to 60% or better.
 - Could that be because on this one day the icing is just bit sweeter, the flavor just a bit better, and the decorations just a tad more attractive?

Why is it that Easter Sunday has the largest attendance of any day in the year, and Good Friday the smallest?

- After all, if it weren't for Good Friday, there would be no Easter to celebrate.
- If there were no cross, there would be no empty tomb.
- If there were no forgiveness, there would be no promise of resurrection.
 - If there were no cake, there would be no icing.

Maybe it's understandable, though.

- Who wants to come and hear about all the ugliness of the crucifixion?
 - The scourging with the whip;
 - the sharp thorns pushed into His head;
 - the mocking and the spitting and the jeers of the crowd;
 - the cross and its terrible death.
 - It's no wonder we don't want to face Good Friday.
- After all, we know what happened.
 - Why come and face all that again?
 - Why not just come and be comfortable in the knowledge that we have been saved through JESUS' victory over death?
 - Who wouldn't want to come for that exciting, glorious good news that JESUS CHRIST is risen?
- But please, don't mention that awful Friday afternoon.
- Don't talk about all that blood and pain that makes us so uncomfortable.
 - And here I've just put it all in front of us again.

Yet try for a moment to go back to that time two thousand years ago.

- Perhaps the closest we might come would be to recall how we felt when John F. Kennedy was assassinated,
- Or when America was attacked on September 11, 2001.

Imagine what it might have been like for those first followers of CHRIST.

- Their day-to-day life had been taken from them.
- Their world had been turned upside down.
 - For nearly three days, they had been locked in their room, wondering what was going to happen next.
 - Would they be next?
 - Was anything going to be the same again?

Their hopes had been smashed, their future destroyed, and nothing was ever going to feel safe or hopeful.

The truth is that, because we weren't there, we can't really know what it was like.

Yet many of us have had our own moments of world crumbling news and our own time trying to lock ourselves away from that which seems to threaten us.

- The words of a doctor, "I'm sorry, but it's malignant."
- The phone call in the middle of the night, "I'm sorry to wake you, but there's been an accident."
- The pronouncement of an accountant, "Maybe if you sell everything."
- The declaration of a spouse, "I don't love you anymore."

Many of us have had such experiences.

- Many of us have had our own dark nights.
 - But, my friends, the Easter resurrection was not born in the brightness of the day.
 - The women came to the tomb while it was still dark.
 - And the light of the good news burst upon them like the morning sun rising over the hills.
 - Death is not the final word.
 - This not the end—in fact it is a new beginning.
 - HE is not here. HE has risen!

New life appears all about us as Spring bursts forth into full bloom.

- All of nature seems to cry out with the possibilities of life.
- The cold ground that for so long seemed dead and barren now bursts forth with beautiful flowers.
- The leafless trees are now covered with new leaves and buds that seem to whisper that life can and does come again.

Easter is the good news that death is not the final word,

- that the cross and the tomb are not the end of the story.

We live a world that says, "You get what you pay for," and "You can't get something for nothing."

- Yet that is precisely what we got when JESUS died on that cross for our sins—something for nothing.
- That is precisely what we receive when we come to the LORD's table—something we haven't earned or even paid for.

Because of JESUS' sacrifice on the cross for us, we get to eat cake,

- only today as we celebrate the resurrection,
 - and in truth, every day that we choose to live our lives in faith in HIM, that cake is covered with icing.

We have been given a gift at no cost to us, a gift that we could not ever earn on our own.

- That's what JESUS' death on the cross is a gift: of love to us, completely undeserved.
 - We have done nothing to merit this sacrifice for us.
 - But because of GOD's love for us and in spite of us, we receive this cake as a free gift.
- Because of JESUS, we do not get what we deserve.
- Because of JESUS, we receive what we do not deserve—the icing on the cake.
 - And having received this gift, we go forth with joy to share this cake with others, icing and all.

Easter is winning the lottery three days after losing your job...and you didn't even buy a ticket.

Easter is knowing that you can't have children...and then finding out that you're pregnant.

Easter is a reprieve from the governor the morning you were to go to the gas chamber.

Easter is discovering that, not only have we been freed from a life of guilt over the sins we have committed,

- but that we also have the promise of something better than we can even imagine when GOD calls us back to life from the tomb of death.

Today, we come to the tomb to look into the reality of death

- and then hear the good news of the angel: "HE is not here among the dead. HE lives again! HE is risen! HE is risen indeed!"
 - Today, Easter is the icing on the cake!