

“Preaching Lent and Easter”  
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Lecture III. *Lessons from the First Holy Week for Preaching on Easter*  
*Finding Easter Faith Again for the First Time*

Let’s jump right into selected readings for Easter Vigil and Easter Day.

1. Easter Vigil

Exod 14.10-31; 15.20-21 and Psalm 114 might seem weird choices for an *Easter Vigil*. They certainly are not Easter Vigil texts *for Egyptians!* Yet, they do speak of a new life of freedom from slavery and death-dealing powers for the ancient Hebrews and all other people whose circumstances are similar. These are themes that link Passover with Holy Thursday, Good Friday, *and Easter*. You might focus on liberation in a *political* sense and/or in an allegorical-*theological* sense. For the latter, you might explore an allegorical interpretation that fits with the epistle lesson (Rom 6.3-11).

Before we turn to the Gospel, we need to remember that the *first* Easter faith did not arise as easily as Easter faith forms on our lips and in our hearts today. Jesus’ crucifixion was a crushing blow to his followers. Their first thoughts were not about his resurrection “on the third day.” They hunkered down in a room behind locked doors for fear that the imperial authorities would come after them next. Some headed home, hopeless, ready to pick up their lives where they left it when they began to follow Jesus. In the ancient Greco-Roman world, resurrection was for heroic athletes and warriors, not for criminals crucified for refusing to pledge loyalty to the Empire and teaching others to refuse to put their trust in Caesars and their client princes. The message of the crucified Messiah was pure foolishness! We need to encounter the first Easter faith “again for the first time,” because “Alleluia, Christ is risen indeed!” has lost so much of its original edginess—until horrific tragedy struck in Haiti, and Ben Larson brought it home to so many of us.<sup>1</sup> Easter faith proclaims that the crucified Jesus and the God who raised him up from the dead pledge their solidarity with the people of Haiti, who like Jesus are “crucified people.” The crucified Jesus and the God who raised him up from the dead say to them, “My peace I give you.”

Lk 24.1-12 ends right when the important action is just about to begin! The empty tomb is not the source or cause of Easter faith. The women, along with the rest of Jesus’ “acquaintances,”<sup>2</sup> had observed Jesus’ crucifixion and followed Joseph of Arimathea as he took Jesus’ body to the tomb. When they returned to the tomb on the next day, they came, not to observe Jesus’ resurrection, but to complete the burial of his body. When they found the tomb empty, they didn’t conclude that he’d been resurrected; rather, they were “perplexed.” When two men dressed in flashing clothing (or was it flashy clothing?), inappropriate for mourning the dead, announced “He is not here, but has risen,” they ran off and told “the eleven and all the rest.” They didn’t believe what they told them, but regarded it as “an idle tale.” Peter had to see the empty tomb for himself and returned home “amazed at what had happened.” (Some ancient manuscripts lack verse 12.) There is no indication that Easter faith arose from the empty tomb!

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<sup>1</sup> Here is an excerpt from “The Life of Ben Larson” (<http://www.flcduluth.org/>): “Benjamin Judd Ulring Splichal Larson, 25, died in the earthquake in Haiti on January 12, 2010. Ben, his wife, Renee Splichal Larson, and his cousin, Jonathan Larson, all three Wartburg Theological Seminary students certified for ordination, were in Haiti learning from and walking with the people of the Eglise Luthérienne d’Haiti (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Haiti). Renee and Jon were able to escape after the top two floors of a six floor building of the St. Joseph’s Home for Boys (up the mountain from Port-au-Prince) collapsed upon them all. Ben was buried in the collapsed ceiling on the resurrection dance theater floor and died after singing a verse of a hymn.”

<sup>2</sup> Lk 23.49. All scripture quotations are adapted from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

What's more, these verses provide no clues to the interpretation of Jesus' resurrection. We have to read the rest of the story to discover that Jesus' resurrection answered the disciples' question about the meaning of Jesus' death. Lk 24.13-48 explains how the *encounter* with the risen Jesus, not the empty tomb, restored the disciples' hope that Jesus would be the one to liberate Israel, after his death dashed their hope to the ground: he led a Bible study on the road to Emmaus to show them that "all the scriptures" teach that it was "necessary" that the Messiah "suffer these things and then enter into his glory." It is in these verses that we learn that the first Easter faith arose "at the *table*" when the risen Jesus "took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them."<sup>3</sup> Like the first disciples, we too can break bread with the risen Christ at the Lord's Table. Our Easter faith doesn't have to depend on believing what on any account sounds like an "idle tale" of an empty tomb. We can know the risen Christ in the breaking of bread!

The next pericope, Lk 24.49-51, explains how Jesus' death was his "departure," *exodus* (Lk 9.31). After his crucifixion, perhaps because of it, he "entered into his glory" when he was raised up and carried into heaven.<sup>4</sup> That's not just another way of talking about Jesus' "life after death" or his next life "in heaven." It's a reference to his participation in, and transformation into, God's glorious nature: his apotheosis, his deification. Born a "son of God,"<sup>5</sup> he lived as a mortal human being, but after (or because of) his crucifixion he became like a God.<sup>6</sup> To "enter into his glory" is also an expression of his exalted status of honor and "fame": "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all the nations," and "to the ends of the earth."<sup>7</sup> The first Easter faith is expressed in the language of being "raised," entering "into his glory," and being "carried up into heaven." This variety of language expresses the renewal of hope that this prophet Jesus is indeed the one who will liberate Israel. So, Jesus' resurrection is all about Jesus' becoming like a God and the continuation of his mission through his followers, empowered by God's power.

Matthew, John, and Paul associate Jesus' resurrection with the promise that the dead shall also be "raised." Paul draws the conclusion that those who are united with Christ through baptism not only participate in a death like his—i.e., a death to sin—but also will participate in a resurrection like his: that is, that they also will be transformed into "the image of the man of heaven" by putting on an "imperishable" and "immortal" body.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the baptized will also become like gods.<sup>9</sup> In Romans 6 and 8, 1 Corinthians 15, and Philippians 3, the focus is on "resurrection" as God's transformation of all creation as the solution to the weakness of the flesh/body/world that makes it subject to the power of sin, decay, and death. Also, Paul's focus is less on what happens to individuals *after they die*—"life after death"—than on the transformation of *all*, the *living* as well as the *dead*, indeed, *the transformation of all of creation* into a new creation *without sin, death, and decay*. Absent is an interest in the reunion of the living with dead loved ones, except in 1 Thess 4.13-18, where it is foregrounded in a text that otherwise would foreground Jesus' arrival as *the Lord/ruler of the world* as a challenge to the *faux* lordship of the Caesars<sup>10</sup>. Instead, Paul's primary focus is on *the union of all with Christ*.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Lk 24.35: "Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread."

<sup>4</sup> Compare Lk 24.26, 51, and Acts 1.9.

<sup>5</sup> See Lk 1.35; 3.38; 4.3, 9, 41; 22.70; and Acts 9.20.

<sup>6</sup> Compare Rom 1.4, 1 Cor 15.39-49, and Phil 2.6-11.

<sup>7</sup> See Lk 24.47 and Acts 1.8.

<sup>8</sup> Compare Rom 6.3-11 (one of the Easter Vigil texts) and 1 Cor 15.49-53.

<sup>9</sup> Also see Rom 8.17 and 29.

<sup>10</sup> See Helmut Koester, "Imperial Ideology and Paul's Eschatology in 1 Thessalonians," in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), 158-66.

Luke (and Mark), however, says nothing about a resurrection *for us*.<sup>11</sup> If you want to focus your Easter Vigil on the promise of resurrection *for us*, choose the Gospel of Matthew<sup>12</sup> or John<sup>13</sup> and/or the reading from Romans (6.3-11). For Luke, Jesus' resurrection was a kind of "one-off" event, for Jesus alone. Only he has deserved to become like a God. "We" benefit from his resurrection because, through it, he is able to send "power from on high" to his disciples and to the church of all generations for carrying out his mission "to all nations."

A *Lukan* Easter Vigil will focus on God's faithfulness to Jesus, whom God anointed "to bring good news to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk 4.18-19, citing Isa 61.1-2). Jesus had been faithful to proclaim this good news to the end, and God was/is faithful to Jesus—and to the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed—by raising Jesus up from the dead, so that he could keep on proclaiming this good news after his death. Jesus' presence in the table fellowship of his disciples after his death renewed their hope in this good news and their commitment to proclaim it to all the nations.

So, in a sense, and to paraphrase Rudolf Bultmann's famous statement, Jesus arose into the church's proclamation of the good news! Witnesses to the good news for the poor, captives, the blind, and oppressed—like Ben Larson and so many others—are witnesses to the presence of the living Christ, accompanying them in their affliction and calling everyone to struggle for release from their afflictions. An Easter Vigil in the vernacular of Luke's Gospel will "proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" for the people of Haiti, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, Nigeria, for all the poor and oppressed in the world, including in our own communities.

## 2. Easter Day

Preaching on Easter Day, and on the rest of Eastertide, requires an understanding of our deepest hopes and desires. These texts help us remember what they are "again for the first time," because many of us have forgotten them, or replaced them with hopes and desires that are too small, too narrow, and too selfish. Even more than that, they help us remind us "again for the first time" that God is the source of our deepest hopes and desires, and not we ourselves. Once more, we also see in these texts how intertwined *theological* and *political* God's hopes and desires are!

Isa 65.17-25 says it all so clearly that I will simply recast it as a song of hope for the people of Haiti.

- <sup>17</sup> For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;  
the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.
- <sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating;  
for I am about to create Haiti as a joy, and its people as a delight.
- <sup>19</sup> I will rejoice in Haiti, and delight in them as my people;  
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.
- <sup>20</sup> No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days,  
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;  
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,  
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
- <sup>21</sup> They shall build houses in Haiti and inhabit them;  
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
- <sup>22</sup> They shall not build and another inhabit;  
they shall not plant and another eat;  
for like the days of a tree shall the days of Haiti, my people, be,

<sup>11</sup> An exception might be Lk 23.43, but (1) Jesus' promise is addressed only to one person; (2) the concept of "paradise," which fits the view of the world of the "after-life" in Lk 16.19-31, is not part of the language of Jesus' resurrection in ch. 24; and (3) it is based on the Jewish belief in the resurrection for all righteous persons, not on Jesus' resurrection.

<sup>12</sup> Mt 27.52 makes Jesus' *death* the event that gives new life to the dead; but then v. 53 "corrects" that view by identifying Jesus' resurrection as the event launching the apocalyptic general resurrection of the dead.

<sup>13</sup> However, see my reflections on John 20 below.

and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

<sup>23</sup>They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity;  
for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—and their descendants as well.

<sup>24</sup>Before they call I will answer,  
while they are yet speaking I will hear.

<sup>25</sup>The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,  
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;  
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!

They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

Ps 118.1-2, 14-24 peaks my interest in what the lectionary committee didn't want me to hear! By cutting out verses 3-13, the lectionary silences the psalm's *political* content, which is the psalm's interpretive context. The psalmist chastised the people for putting their hope in *political* alliances and the strength of *the military* to deal with their national enemies, and instead praises *God* as the source of their hope of deliverance from their enemies. That is why this psalm is the "final psalm sung as part of the Passover celebration, and the last of the Egyptian Hallel (praise) Psalms."<sup>14</sup> Once again, Christian liturgical tradition connects the *political* liberation theology of Passover with Easter.<sup>15</sup> That connection is severed when the *political* content of the middle verses of Psalm 118 are cut out. As a result, Christians are prevented from considering the *political* implications of applying this psalm to Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jesus, according to the Gospel of John, was crucified by those who put their trust in "mortals" and "princes" when they declared that Caesar was their only "king" (Jn 18.1-19.42). To show that God is the only true ruler of the world, and not the Caesars of this world, God lifted up and exalted the very one "mortals" and "princes" crucified to assert their imperial rule over the world. Jesus, according to the Gospel of Luke, put his trust in God (Lk 23.46). God answered his prayer and did not "give him over to death" (Ps 118.18).

Through the lens of this psalm, we see Jesus as a "wounded healer," a "redeemed redeemer"! In this "redeemed redeemer," all those against whom the world's "princes" have sinned, the world's "crucified people," can find One who accompanies them in, and redeems them from, their afflictions.<sup>16</sup> At this point, a preacher's instinct might be to move quickly into "a pep talk or marching orders" for what we ought to do in response to what God has done in and for the crucified Christ; but this psalm is a song of *praise*.<sup>17</sup> Before giving "marching orders," the first order of business is the reorientation of our hopes and desires to their proper source: *God*. As someone has said, right theology, and I would add right preaching, is first of all *doxological*. Proper *doxology*, however, invites and calls us into active participation in God's healing and saving actions in the world. How can we praise God for liberating slaves from Egypt without asking for God's help to liberate slaves in our own time and world? How can we praise God for redeeming the Redeemer from the death-dealing hands of the "princes" of the Roman Empire and not also ask God to help redeem all who suffer and die at the hands of death-dealing nations of our time and world? After all, didn't Jesus protest against a temple whose *faux* doxology served the interests of unjust "mortals" and "princes"?<sup>18</sup> Proper doxologies lead to *mission*, and mission is informed by proper *doxologies*!

<sup>14</sup> Mary E. Shields, "Exegetical Perspective," in *Feasting on the Word*, Bartlett et al. (eds.), Year C, vol. 2: 361.

<sup>15</sup> Portions of Psalm 118 are also assigned to Passion/Psalms Sunday.

<sup>16</sup> See Barbara E. Reid, *Taking Up the Cross: New Testament Interpretation Through Latina and Feminist Eyes*, revised edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); Walter Altmann, *Luther and Liberation: A Latin American Perspective*, trans. Mary M. Solberg (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); Paul S. Chung, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, and Kyöng-jae Kim, *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium: A Theology of Minjung in Fourth-Eye Formation*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 70 (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2007); and Andrew Sung Park, *Triune Atonement: Christ's Healing for Sinners, Victims, and the Whole Creation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Craig A. Satterlee, "Homiletical Perspective," in *Feasting on the Word*, Bartlett et al. (eds.), Year C, vol. 2: 365.

<sup>18</sup> See Mk 11.15-17 and parallels in Matthew, Luke, and John.

Acts 10.34-43 reminds us, first of all, who *Jesus* was and is: “he went about *doing good* and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him”; “they” crucified him, but *God* raised him; “he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead,” so that, as “All the prophets testify about him...everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” Once again, begin with *doxology*: praise God for what God has done in, with, and through Jesus Christ! But here too *doxology* leads to *mission*, to witnessing, with words and actions, to what God *keeps on doing*, in, with, and through Jesus Christ. For God promises that “in every nation anyone who worships, trusts, and obeys God and does what is right is acceptable to God.” Just as the first Easter faith was *doxological* and a *call to mission*, so also may our Easter faith be *doxological* and a *call to mission*!

John 20 has two parts: the first, verses 1-18, is assigned to Easter Day; the second, verses 19-31, is assigned to the second Sunday of Easter. Part I takes place at the tomb. As in the Synoptic tradition, a woman is the first to discover the empty tomb. Mary Magdalene deduces from the opened tomb that Jesus’ body had been removed by unknown persons to an unknown location. Two disciples, Peter and the disciple “whom Jesus loved,” go to the tomb to see what Mary reported. A somewhat comedic footrace establishes that the “beloved” disciple has surpassed Peter’s status as the first among the disciples to see the risen Jesus.<sup>19</sup> Both disciples see what Mary saw, but only the “beloved” disciple “believed”—what he believed, we are not told. Neither disciple understood “the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.” We are also not told what “scripture”: Psalm 118? Second Isaiah’s fourth Servant Song? In any case, the emptiness of the tomb does not produce the first Easter faith. The two disciples return “home” as devoid of Easter faith as they were before their footrace to see the empty tomb.

The narrative returns to Mary, pushed aside to give the two male disciples the first chance to proclaim the first Easter faith. Weeping in grief, as one without hope, Mary has a vision of two angels standing where Jesus’ head and feet would have been. Their question, “Why are you weeping?” is so dumb—it’s obvious why a woman would be weeping at the tomb of her dear friend—it must serve to elicit a repeat of Mary’s theory that “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him” in order to underscore another obvious point: the first Easter faith was not a logical deduction from the tomb’s emptiness. An empty tomb is a cold, silent fact, and an Easter faith deduced from it might be logical, but it would be a faith squeezed out of cold, objective, calculated reasoning.

As Mary “turned around,” the story turns from rational deductions from assumptions to an encounter with a person. She saw “Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.” Typical of stories of the appearance of friends and heroes after they have died and were made alive again, encounters of this kind begin with an initial mistaken identity. Mary thinks this is the unknown person of her assumption: a gardener who has removed Jesus’ body. Like the two angels, Jesus asks a dumb question, as if to make sure we understand the tomb’s emptiness is not the reason why the first Easter faith arose. It also sets up the reason for the season: when Jesus calls her name, in this personal encounter Mary recognizes the identity of the stranger. Later she will announce to the disciples that she had seen the Lord, but for now she just wants to cling to his body. Does she think the historical Jesus has been revived, resuscitated? Or does she want to keep the risen Jesus for herself? Whatever she might have thought, and whatever purpose we are supposed to see in her action, we are told that Jesus’ resurrection will not be complete until he has “ascended...to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” This first personal encounter, by a woman mind you, is followed by another. Out of these *encounters*, the first Easter faith arises.

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<sup>19</sup> See 1 Cor 15.5. Compare Lk 24.34, which refers out of the blue to an appearance of the risen Jesus to Peter, but no account of had been provided.

Jn 20.19-29 is a scene that takes place behind locked doors, “for fear of the Judeans.”<sup>20</sup> Here we see the historical and *political* interpretive context for the rise of the first Easter faith: terror at the brutality of imperial Roman occupation of Judea. The disciples could not trust the Judean leaders, the temple authorities, because they were in collusion with the Roman occupation army, who had crucified Jesus. They were the ones who used “extreme rendition” to attempt to extract information from Jesus about his disciples. The disciples had every reason to “fear the Judeans”! They were in mortal, *political* danger of suffering the same fate as their leader.

With the doors bolted shut, Jesus nevertheless manages to enter the room and stand among them. At the tomb, the stone door had to be removed before he could exit. Now he is able to pass through locked doors, like Patrick Swayze in the movie *Ghost*. Yet, we don’t read about how that freaked out the disciples!<sup>21</sup> Instead, our attention is focused on Jesus’ words addressed to their “fear of the Judeans”: “Peace be with you.” I can’t help but remember that Ben Larson sang a song of God’s peace as his last words. His song of faith was an echo of Jesus’ comfort to fearful disciples. Jesus is risen indeed, singing songs of comfort to the afflicted and in the singing voices of Jesus’ witnesses to this day.

It is also fitting that our story answers the question, “How did the first disciples know that the person they encountered was Jesus?” The answer is, because they “saw” and “touched” the wounds of his crucifixion. The risen Jesus retains his identity as “a crucified person”!<sup>22</sup> The one whom God made victorious over death-dealing imperial powers, and over death itself, continues to identify with “crucified people,” people who are sinned against. As one who was himself sinned against and then lifted up and received by God, he accompanies all “crucified people” and offers them God’s peace.

Finally, as in the resurrection stories in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus’ resurrection is also about Jesus’ commissioning of the disciples—and us—to carry on Jesus’ mission: “When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’” (Jn 20.22-23). Now, “sin” in this Gospel refers, not to violations of Jewish laws, but to the refusal to believe that Jesus speaks and is the Word of God. That refusal is tantamount, in John’s view, to a violation of the first commandment to believe in God with one’s body, soul, and strength; it is also a violation of the second, “new,” commandment to love one another as Jesus has loved the disciples, and the world, to the end.<sup>23</sup>

Jesus passes on to his disciples the authority to “forgive the sins of any.” This is the only reference to the forgiveness of sins in the Gospel of John. Jn 9.41 suggests the possible meaning of forgiveness and its opposite, to “retain the sins of any”: “If you were blind, *you would not have sin*. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ *your sin remains*.” Jesus imparts his spirit to the disciples so that they might continue his mission of taking away the sin of “seeing” but not “believing.” This “book” was “written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God” (Jn 20.31), and so they are to preach and teach, so that others may come to believe. And so you also are commissioned to preach and teach, so that others may come to believe that the crucified and risen Jesus is “the Messiah, the son of God”—the one who accompanies “crucified people” and sings to them, “God’s peace I give to you.”

One final note: whether “eternal life” in the fourth Gospel is future/eschatological or experienced in the present by those who hear Jesus’ “word” and believe the One who sent him is a matter of debate among scholars. “Eternal life” is spoken of in the present tense,<sup>24</sup> and it is even said that anyone who hears Jesus’ “word” and believes the One who sent him “has passed from death to life” (5.24)! Yet, it also

<sup>20</sup> The traditional translation, “king of the Jews,” is problematic for at least two reasons. (1) “Jews” is a term for people observant of Mosaic traditions scattered in many nations, so it would not make sense to speak of their “king.” (2) The region under the temple and Pilate’s jurisdiction is Judea. The Romans deposed their client “king,” Herod’s son Archelaus, and replaced him with Roman agents of the emperor. Pilate would, therefore, be concerned about anyone aspiring to be “king of Judea.” (3) The traditional translation has had a fateful history of persecution of Jews throughout Christian history. An increasingly popular translation among scholars is “Judeans.”

<sup>21</sup> Compare Lk 24.33-43.

<sup>22</sup> Compare Mk 16.6 (par. Mt 28.5) and Lk 24.39a (“Look at my hands and my feet”).

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., Jn 5.22-23; 7.28-30; 8.19; 9.24-41; 14.1; 16.8-11.

<sup>24</sup> See Jn 3.36; 5.24; 6.47, 54; 17.2-3; and 1 Jn 3.15; 5.11, 13.

says that Jesus will prepare a place for “you” in God’s “house,” where there are “many dwelling places,” and that he will return and take “you” to be where he is going (14.2-4).<sup>25</sup> These second person plurals refer to Jesus’ disciples and so they refer to “us” only by transferring what was first meant for them to us; moreover, it is not at all clear that what is meant is a life *beyond the grave*, since it does not say that “you” will be *dead* when Jesus gathers them to himself in God’s “house.” The last line of chapter 20 might also speak of a future/eschatological “eternal life,” although it might also be consistent with the present tenses earlier in the Gospel.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps we best leave this debate unresolved and say that “eternal life” *this side of the grave* is life as it is meant to be—abundant and full of truth, light, and peace—and that the *future* “eternal life” is about continuing the fellowship with God in Christ that had already begun in this life.

In short, the first Easter faith was confident in its *doxology* and in its *commission* to continue God’s mission in Christ for the sake of God’s love for the world. Of that, we too can be confident. All other details are *adiaphora*. Feast on the flexible and not fixed, rich variety of language for the first Easter faith. But remember what the main meal is: the faithfulness of God and Jesus, who love the world to the end. Easter is the season to praise and follow their faithful love, “pure, unbounded love, . . . love divine, all loves excelling.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> A clear future reference is Jn 6.40.

<sup>26</sup> The present tense of the subjunctive (*echēte*, translated “may have”) in 20.31 does not have a temporal meaning; rather, it only signifies the progressive quality of the present tense (see also 3.15, 16). Compare Jn 4.14; 6.27, 68; 10.10, 28; 12.25, 50; 1 Jn 2.25; 5.20.

<sup>27</sup> The phrases “pure, unbounded love” and “love divine, all loves excelling” come from Charles Wesley’s hymn by that title, composed in 1747.

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