

What I Love About Easter

By PAUL J. SCHARF

I remember my mother once saying—quoting her father—that Easter Sunday is a lot like heaven. Perhaps it is the closest thing that we will experience to it here upon the earth.

I cannot prove that statement Biblically, but I have attempted to meditate upon it through the years, and I think there is much truth in it.

Growing up, I was part of a church tradition that placed great emphasis on Easter Sunday—which some strongly prefer to call Resurrection Sunday—and all of the events leading up to it. By the time we got to Holy Week—which I now prefer to call Passion Week—to my young mind it was as if we were really reliving the events of those most awesome days. It was as if Christ truly had to go the way of the cross on Friday, before we found out once again that He “is risen indeed” (Luke 24:34) on Sunday.

These customs made an indelible impact upon me. Good Friday ended with the closing of the Bible and the darkening of the church, and silence. Easter Sunday began with a service at the actual time of sunrise, and that made a point. The day—well, except for the years we had April snowstorms—was truly like a blast of bright, blinding sunlight that overwhelmed the darkness we had left behind on Friday.

Yes, we celebrated Lent. The term Lent triggers strong emotions in two opposing directions among evangelicals. In some quarters, it is making a comeback. Others believe that the mere mention of it is heresy.

I understand that Lent has long historical ties, as well as many dubious modern connections, with which we may not wish to be associated. Please understand that I am not making a case for instituting Lent in our evangelical churches.

But I would say two things in addition. First, if you believe that we should have nothing related to Lent at all in our churches, then it would also be inconsistent to celebrate Easter, for it is obviously connected in terms of its historical development as part of the Christian church calendar. But secondly, I would argue that there is a better way. Since most of us in our culture, to say nothing of the church, are going to celebrate Easter, why not implement some of the important and good things that the season of Lent taught me as a child without carrying forth its baggage or using the term?

The resurrection did not happen in a vacuum, but followed all the details of what we may generally call Jesus’ passion—details that take up an incredibly large percentage of the text of the four gospels.

I believe that the message of Jesus’ passion and resurrection deserves more than one Sunday a year. We do not do it justice when we come together on Easter morning, without any emotional preparation, to sing a few Easter hymns and gospel songs, hear

a sermon on the resurrection, and then allow the subject to drift from our minds. By comparison, many churches begin their preparations for the Christmas season (which is just as much a part of that same church calendar) before the first hint of fall.

But which of the two—the birth of Christ, or His death, burial and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:3-4)—receives the greatest emphasis in Scripture? Where should we be placing our focus?

Let's take Easter Sunday this year and remember how its events direct our minds toward heaven (Col. 3:1-4). As we get older, we know more and more people who have gone there, and we ache to see them again in the resurrection. And perhaps Easter provides the closest thing we have to a palpable connection with them. We share together in the hope of that resurrection because of what Jesus has done. His death paid the cost of our sin; His resurrection opened the way to life eternal (John 14:19).

There are many issues that might take our minds off of things eternal this week. There is the worldwide health and economic crisis of COVID-19. In my state, there were elections. If the deadlines hadn't been moved, there would be taxes due in a few days.

But this week is not about any of those things—important as they may be. It is about the eternal hope that we have in Jesus Christ. Everything else, significant as it is in the here and now, is mere background noise until we get past Sunday.

What do you love about Easter? I invite you to take some time this week and determine the answer to that question.

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