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Easter 6 – John 14:23-29 – Easter Endures Eternally!

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Did you know that there are only 216 shopping days left till Christmas? It seems like now is about the time my grandma would start asking me for a list when I was younger, and the way things are going, it seems like it should be just about any day now that we'll see Walmart and Menards setting up their displays for the 2022 season. Growing up, I remember taking summer vacations where we'd see "Christmas in July" celebrations and whole stores dedicated entirely to Christmas decorations, and it took me about two minutes of research online to discover that around our country there are such things as Christmas museums, Santa Claus academies, and even entire cities devoted to celebrating Christmas year-round.

At Christmastime, it seems like we hear an awful lot about keeping the Christmas spirit alive throughout the year... so that makes me wonder: why don't we feel that same way about the Easter season? I mean, after all, Christmas is important, but it's like the kickoff to the Superbowl. Shouldn't we celebrate most of all at the end, when the work is finished and the victory is won? Because that's exactly what Easter is! We celebrate that Christ is risen and God accepted his perfect sacrifice on our behalf; that sin, death, and the devil are fully and forever defeated; and that through faith, we're guaranteed to live forever with Jesus and rise up from the grave with perfected bodies one day, too, just like him. So even if the pastels and Easter lilies don't stand the test of time as well as some Christmas decorations do, as we approach the end of the church season of Easter, let's remember and rejoice that Easter endures eternally – that's true now when we hold to Jesus' Word in love, and it's true forevermore because Jesus gives us his peace.

So the Gospel lessons for last week, this week, and next week all come from the section of Scripture known as Jesus' Upper Room discourse in John chapters 13-17. On that Maundy Thursday evening, Jesus knew exactly what was coming in the next 24 hours, and so he was teaching his disciples and trying to prepare them for what lay ahead. When they left that room, their world was going to turn upside down as they saw their Savior betrayed, arrested, and crucified – while they all ran for their lives. Nothing was ever going to be the same and Jesus wasn't going to be with them anymore, at least not in a way that they could see or sense. So what should they do then? How should they react? How should they go on?

Well Jesus' answer was very simple: hold to my Word. "*If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.*" See, it wasn't like Jesus was some fad that they had to just get over or move on from. What Jesus did for them and what Jesus taught them was like a bird teaching its chicks to fly so that when it was time to leave the nest, they could just spread their wings and go to do and share everything he called them to. Jesus' teaching was meant to be actively put into practice because outward action is the natural follow-through of inward faith – or in other words, as Jesus says, the way Jesus wants us to show that we love him is by obeying his teaching – or a better translation would be by *holding to his Word*, by keeping it pure and true and never letting go.

Unfortunately, Jesus' disciples and followers had a bad habit of doing just that. Jesus told them any number of times that he was going to be arrested by the Jews and handed over to the Gentiles to be crucified. But did they remember? No. Even on Easter morning, the angels who were there to greet the women at the empty tomb almost scolded them for not remembering that Jesus promised that he would rise again and meet the disciples in Galilee. The list could go on, but that's enough to see that when we don't hold to Jesus' Word, that can only lead our faith and life away from Jesus and into doubt and hopelessness and unbelief.

So that's why we *Sola Scriptura* Lutherans insist so strongly on basing our every article of faith solidly on Scripture alone. We hold to Jesus' Word when we keep total faithfulness to *every* teaching in the Scriptures – not just the "major" ones. We hold to Jesus' Word when we confess our faith boldly with the Church of the ages. We hold to Jesus' Word when we live not our own individual, subjective truths (whatever that means), but when we live Jesus' Truth. And when we hold to Jesus' Word, that's how we show love not only to Jesus himself, but also to the Father who sent him, also to the Holy Spirit who works in his Name, and also to everyone around us who will be blessed through our Christian action and example.

So how does that look? Holding to Jesus' teaching doesn't just mean railing against the bad in society; it also means upholding and promoting the good and godly and following Jesus' example of dignified, humble, loving service. Holding to Jesus' teaching doesn't just mean railing against homosexuality or divorce or adultery or gender dysphoria, for example. It means loving and respecting your spouse, being faithful to your marriage vows, and being a positive example to a jaded culture of why traditional Christian marriage and values really are the best thing for our society. Holding to Jesus' teaching

doesn't just mean railing against abortion; it means cherishing your own children, investing in what is truly good for their lives now and in eternity, and loving and forgiving those whose consciences are crushed by the mistakes they've made and the decisions they can't take back. Holding to Jesus' teaching doesn't just mean railing against the injustice and ungodliness that's present in our country's political arena right now. It means being gentle and respectful in political debate – no matter how strong your opinions are – honoring our elected officials even if we may disagree with their policies or methods, and appreciating that government is in fact a good gift from God without which our lives would be so much worse.

In short, we hold to Jesus' teaching when we always follow his Word of Law and Gospel in our lives, and when we do that, Easter endures eternally. See, that's what Jesus was trying to teach his disciples that night. Our faith isn't dead and gone because Jesus isn't dead and gone. Maybe we can't see Christ with our eyes, but we can see him in our Christ-like words and actions. And just like Luther used to say, when we are faithful to God's Word in every calling and aspect of our lives – in every *vocation* we have (parent, sibling, spouse, child, student, employer, employee, co-worker, church member, citizen, and so forth) – then we really are acting as the hands and feet and masks of God in this world, and that means the Risen Christ still lives among us in a special way through our faithfulness and love.

But it's not just holding to Jesus' Word in love that reminds us that Easter endures eternally. It's also because Jesus gives us his peace. Again, peace is something we talk about all the time in connection with Christmas – Glory to God in the highest and on earth *peace*, goodwill toward men; *peace* on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled; sleep in heavenly *peace* – you remember the famous refrains. But the truth is, peace is something that could only be fully delivered because of Easter.

See, if Jesus hadn't come out of his grave for us, we could never truly be at peace. We would be enemies with God, stuck under his just judgment for our sins without any way to get ourselves out and with nothing but hell waiting for us. But when Jesus rose again on that first Easter morning, he cleansed our hearts, he reconciled us to God, and he left the record of our debts before God just as empty as his tomb was. So that means now and into the future, we have peace to deal with any difficulties that might come into our lives by faith, and by Jesus' promise of the resurrection – his own resurrection and our resurrection to follow – we can even stare our greatest enemy, death, right in the face and smile.

And that's not easy to do when we look around us at this world and see all the scary and ugly things that are happening. If it's not tornadoes and floods, then it's shootings and terrorism, and if it's not shootings and terrorism, then it's threats to our freedoms of religion and speech, and if it's not threats to our freedoms of religion and speech, then it's faithlessness and lovelessness in society and even in the church. And friends, that's why it's so important now as much as ever to hear Jesus' promise: "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*"

The fact is that "Christ is risen" is the answer to every one of those troubles and fears, and only because Christ is risen can we have the peace that only he can give. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead means that neither tornadoes nor floods, neither shootings nor terrorism, neither threats to our political freedoms nor apostasy in the church can take away the heaven that Jesus has won for us who trust in him. In fact, it means that no matter what happens now, Christ is in heaven preparing a place for us, that he is ruling over all things today and every day for our spiritual and eternal good, and that Christ will surely come back one day to take us home, because he has promised it and he never lies to us. That gives us peace for every situation that nothing can take away from us. It puts our minds at ease as we grapple with all the difficulties we have to deal with and all the things that just don't seem to make sense here in this sin-broken world and it puts our hearts at ease no matter what lies the devil might still try to tell us about our spiritual lives and our relationship with God, because Jesus' resurrection means nothing can separate us from his love or from the blessings that he secured for us by his triumph over the grave on that first Easter morning.

So while it seems like Christmas is the more popular holiday around the country and that's probably not very likely to change, maybe it's best to just let Jesus explain why we should remember and rejoice that Easter endures eternally. Only a few verses before our sermon text began, Jesus said to his disciples, "*Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live*" (John 14:19). By the power of the Holy Spirit who works in Jesus' Name, the risen Christ doesn't live on before our eyes anymore. No, even better and even closer, the risen Christ lives on inside our hearts by faith now and he promises us Easter peace that will never end because he's preparing a home for us to live on with him forever in heaven. So even though in just a few days we'll be celebrating Jesus' ascension, let's keep this rallying cry on our lips: Christ is still risen, always risen, forever risen, because even if we can't see him now, we know that Easter endures eternally when we hold to Jesus' Word in love and because Jesus gives us his peace for today and forevermore. Amen.