

God, Life and Everything Working Toward Easter

Just four days!

Four short days and then the Easter Bunn-

No, no bunnies! In four days, something far more profound, far more exciting, far better will happen. We will celebrate the resurrection.

True, resurrection doesn't have quite the fun factor of countless children running around the yard looking for hidden eggs. It doesn't have quite the yum factor of endless chocolate eggs either.

But let's face it, if you're reading this, you've graduated from those children's amusements. And if you're mature enough to see through the Easter Bunny, then you're ready to handle the work that goes into getting to Easter.

You see, for Christians around the world, Easter is not just a day. It is the culmination of forty days of preparation. Forty days of looking deep inside ourselves, giving up something worldly so we can focus on our souls. This time is used to appreciate just how small we are compared to God. It's a time we use to see how wondrous a relationship with God can be. It is a time to finally get just how much God loves us.

All those forty days are then concentrated into one short week - this week, which we call Holy Week. Holy Week started with Palm Sunday when we remember how Jesus entered into Jerusalem and was hailed as a hero. Then it proceeds through Maundy Thursday (known in some churches as Holy Thursday), the day when Jesus celebrated the Last Supper (and thereby created the sacrament of Communion), and was arrested by religious authorities for blasphemy. The week hits its low point on Good Friday when we remember how Jesus was crucified.

There is physical preparation as well as spiritual preparation in these few days before Easter. Most churches have services on all or some of the days of Holy Week, especially on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Some churches like ours also have an Easter Vigil - a late evening service on Saturday night when we remember how Jesus rose from death while everyone slept.

In our congregation, we have Maundy Thursday worship (7:00 PM) followed by something called THE WATCH. There we metaphorically sit with Christ throughout the night. Well, each of us signs up to sit for one hour, but we stay collectively through the night. It helps us be quiet with Christ - nobody talks to anyone during the Watch.

Then on Good Friday, we take part in the community Walk of the Cross (10:30 AM starting in front of Regina Coeli). This walk is so powerful, as we carry a very large cross through town, stopping at stations along the way to remember how Christ carried his cross.

We have an evening service that day, too (7:00 PM), where anyone who wants can come up and pray at that same cross.

My favorite service of Holy Week and Easter, though, is the Easter Vigil (8:00 PM) which begins outside when we build a fire - the new fire of life. It is a liturgy of mystery and power, where light comes out of the dark and life comes from the tomb.

Then of course, on Easter morning, we have loud music, laughter - and yes, an Easter Egg hunt after our 10:00 AM service. Join us!

Just remember, there's a lot of work to get ready for these services, but we do it because working our way through Holy Week toward Easter reminds us just how important it is to embrace that love God has for us. It reminds us just how costly love can be.

So if you observe Easter, let me encourage you not to skip the work of Holy Week on your way to that joyous day. Go to the services with your fellow Christians. Be part of that Last Supper. Walk the way of the Cross with Jesus. Sit in the dark of the tomb. It will make the light and joy of Easter all the more wondrous.