

Come to the Table

I Corinthians 15:1-11; John 20:1-18

Easter is all about the victory of God. In our world it is important to know who has prevailed. Christians wonder is it death or life? Is it meaningless, or is there purpose? Are we cursed or blessedly? Is it about the love of power or the power of love?

Cassie Bernall, who was a promising student, walked into Columbine High School on a Tuesday morning. Soon the high school became a war zone. Cassie's story is told by her mother, Mary Bernall, in *She Said Yes*. "Do you believe in God?" One of the heavily-armed gunmen asked the blonde girl reading her Bible in the library while the school was under siege. "Yes, I believe in God, she replied in a voice that was strong enough to be heard by classmates hidden beneath the nearby tables and desks. The gunman in the long black trench coat laughed, "Why?" Then he raised his gun and shot and killed 17 year old Cassie Bernall. It seems that Cassie must have had a premonition. She had reflected on these questions of life and death. When it became apparent that she was not coming home that terrible Tuesday, her brother found her notebook lying on a desk, filled with words that echoed the testimony of the Apostle Paul in *Philippians*.

"More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

The women go to the tomb, the gospel writer tells us, while it was still dark. We are not pretending that death is not real, that death holds no power. "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death is your sting?" We are affirming that death has been swallowed up in victory. That is a statement of faith, an affirmation of hope. That is Easter! Victory over death, hope for the future, Faith in what we may not understand and what we cannot see. It is this Easter understanding that brings us to the Table of our Lord.

Music of all genres speaks to me. I can often hear the Spirit in words put to music, regardless of the intent of the composer or author. There is a relatively new song playing on the radio in recent months that has really spoken to me. Each time I hear it played I hear something new as the group *Sidewalk Prophets* issue God's invitation to the Meal that is before us today. It begins with:

*We all start on the outside, the outside looking in.
This is where grace begins. We were hungry, we were thirsty
With nothing left to give, Oh the shape that we were in.
Just when all hope seemed lost, Love opened the door for us
He said come to the table, Come join the sinners who have been redeemed.
Take your place beside the Savior now, Sit down and be set free. Come to the table.*

On the outside? Hungry? Thirsty? All hope lost? Yes, that is exactly when Jesus calls out to us. That is exactly who Jesus died for, and overcame all the evils of this earth including death, that we might receive love and be redeemed. Yes, this table is for sinners, to sit beside the risen Savior of the world. The song continues:

*Come meet this motley crew of misfits; these liars and these thieves.
There's no one unwelcome here, no.
So **that** sin and shame that you brought with you, You can leave it at the door,
And let mercy draw you near. Just come to the table.*

Indeed, we are a motley crew! Sinners all! Every last one of us has fallen short. Not one is better than or different than the other. Each of us created in God's own image, each one loved so much by God that he came to earth, walked with us, fully human, suffered, bled, died, was buried, just like each of us, and then was raised from the dead demonstrating the hope and promise that are ours!

*Come join the sinners, you have been redeemed. Take your place beside the Savior now,
Sit down and be set free. Come to the table. Just come to the table.*

By God through Jesus Christ, We have been redeemed, and we are invited through that marvelous gift of grace, to come to the table, not because of what we have done, but because of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. We are set free from all and everything that holds us back. That is what Easter is all about – being set free!

For whom did God do this? The lyrics continue:

*To the thief, to the doubter, To the hero and the coward, To the prisoner and the soldier,
To the young, to the older, All who hunger, all who thirst, All the last, all the first,
All the paupers and the princes, All who fail, you've been forgiven.*

*All who dream, all who suffer, All who loved and lost another
All the chained, all the free, all who follow, all who lead,
Anyone who's been let down, all the lost, you have been found
All who've been labeled right or wrong, everyone who hears this song...*

*Just come, come to the table, Oh eh, come join the sinners you have been redeemed.
Take your place beside the Savior. Just sit down and be set free.
Oh come on Just sit down and be set free, Come to the table.
Come on now. Come to the table. You're welcome here.*

On this Day of Resurrection, the good news is that this is true. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen, indeed. Death has been swallowed up in victory, and we've been set free. How will we respond? With the words of the apostle Paul, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." We respond as resurrected people. We respond as forgiven, loved, freed, redeemed Children of God. We come to the table.