

Laetare

And Jesus went up on a mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near.

You will recall what the Passover feast commemorated.

The first Passover, was marked by the greatest confluence of miracles ever seen. It started with Moses' staff turning into a serpent and his hand becoming leprous and then healed before the eyes of the people.

Then came the 10 plagues: 1 the Nile River turned to blood. 2 Then frogs. 3 Gnats.

4 Flies. 5 An epidemic spread through the livestock.

6 Boils festered on man and beast. 7 Hail devastated crops.

8 Locusts ate what was left standing. 9 Darkness covered the land.

10 Finally, the firstborn of man and beast in all Egypt died in a single night.

After these, Pharaoh let the Israelites go. But the wonders were not over.

For the Egyptians chased after them again.

So God shielded them through the night with His presence in a pillar of fiery cloud.

Then, He led them through the depths of the Red Sea by making a wall of water to the right and to the left.

And, finally, even while the Red Sea was still parted, He did one more.

He brought mechanical problems upon the chariots of the pursuing Egyptians.

After such a powerful and varied show of force, you would think that the Israelites could take over from here.

After all, how much help could one people need?

But even after the Red Sea crossing, their lives hung in a balance.

For they were now a population of at least 2 million people traveling in a desert.

The logistics were impossible! Water alone was a challenge, not to mention food.

And so God performed yet another miracle.

He gave them manna to eat. Not just once. But six days a week. For forty years.

In this sense, Moses' delivery of the Israelites from slavery was an ongoing task.

It continued through the decades of their travel and every day was a miracle.

Against this background, Jesus comes to you today to say something important:

My deliverance for you is also ongoing.

There is no point at which you can say, "It's over. I am now 'delivered.'"

But that is exactly the way sinful flesh wants to approach salvation.

This is a part of our constant desire to be like God.

Even after we realize our troubles and predicament.

Even after we finally come to admit our inability to save ourselves...

Even after we turn to Christ, it is an idolatrous habit to conceive of God as the One who gives us a leg up.

He rescues us from slavery to sin so that I can now live as I ought.

He frees me so that I am no longer a slave to sin.

He makes me alive so that I can now live for Him.

He forgives me my sin so that I can now serve Him.

All of these common ways of speaking are, of course, true in a sense.

But they are also false in a sense.

The problem lies in the second half of the sentence.

When you treat of Jesus' salvation as something that enables you to now do things for Jesus instead of Him doing things for you.

When you put the emphasis on the first person singular: I am no longer a slave to sin. I can live as I ought. I can serve Jesus. I am now alive.

These are sentences which no longer speak of emancipation and freedom from the devil, but they now speak of emancipation from Jesus.

As if to say, "Thanks for getting me out of that bad place. I'll take over from here." Christians of all stripes treat Christ this way.

Some spend much thought to pinpoint the moment of coming to faith.

"I once was lost, but now I'm found." becomes a declaration of independence.

Conversion becomes a time in life when my full spiritual powers are returned to me and I can now "handle it on my own."

The problem becomes especially acute when conversion itself is seen as something that I do by deciding to follow Jesus.

But the problem is not only found in theologians of "decision."

But also in those who take Baptism seriously.

Even when we understand that Baptism is our own Red Sea rescue.

When you note the Biblical connection of how God, in that holy water, drowns

Satan and the Old Man and brings forth a New Man in Christ.

He makes you the new Israel and no longer in slavery to Sin and Satan.

But when you now begin to think that you are able to do anything apart from Christ and on your own, you are just as hopeless as the millions in the desert.

And this is what Jesus teaches today.

This is why He gives Himself as the New Moses.

Not in the sense of giving us new commandments to do on our own.

But Jesus feeds us in the wilderness.

The miracle of the manna was not a temporary fix.

It was not like any of the one-time events that left up to it.

It was rather ongoing. It was Daily bread. It was a Routine Miracle.

There's an interesting phrase to think about! "Routine Miracle."

This is why the ongoing hearing of God's Word is what defines the Christian life.

This is why the Lord's Supper is so important.

This is why it is a concern when Christians are absent from these gifts.

It is not a matter of asking "How often must I attend Church to make God happy?"

It is rather a question of, "What can I eat in this desert if not Jesus' manna?"

In self-defense, you will surely say, "I feel fine. I'm doing OK."

Jesus doesn't argue with your feelings. He knows what they are worth.

He simply takes bread into His hands and gives thanks and distributes it through the hands of others.

His Body and His Blood are given today as your ongoing food and salvation.

Apart from This, your rescue is undone and you return to dust in the desert.

But with His Words continually in your ears and His Supper continually on your tongue, your rescue and new life is continued day-in and day-out.

This is the very daily bread that you pray for. The forgiveness that you desire.

The answer to temptations of all kinds and your deliverance from every evil.