

The Resurrection of Our Lord (Easter Day)

April 5, 2026

Text: Zechariah 8:19-23 (Lenten Sermon Series Text)

Other Texts: Acts 10:34-43 (First Reading); Colossians 3:1-4 (Epistle);
Matthew 28:1-10 (Gospel)

“Our Fasting Gives Way to Feasting”

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Our text is Zechariah 8:19-23:

“Thus says the LORD of hosts: The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts. Therefore love truth and peace.

“Thus says the LORD of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities. The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD and to seek the LORD of hosts; I myself am going.’ Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’”¹

Fasting. God had commanded the Israelites to fast just once a year: on the Day of Atonement, an external act of worship to indicate their humility before the Lord and their sorrow over sin.² But there was also voluntary fasting. David fasted as he pleaded with the Lord for the life of his infant son.³ Esther asked her fellow Jews to fast while she prepared to ask King Xerxes to spare the Jews in the empire.⁴ Even in the New Testament, Jesus fasted for 40 days in the wilderness, and He spoke about fasting as a commonly observed custom saying, “When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret.”⁵ And in Acts, we read that the believers at Antioch fasted and prayed for God’s favor before they sent Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey.⁶

Voluntary fasting as a spiritual discipline is not very common today, though it is making a bit of a resurgence amongst some Christians. As we heard, it can be used in a positive manner to express remorse over sin, to discipline ourselves so we do not cater to our body’s desires but rule over them, to remind us of all that Jesus freely gave up for us, and to take the time fasting to focus on God’s Word. In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther writes that “fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training” when preparing ourselves to receive the Lord’s Supper. Is it required? No. Is it possible to be abused: thinking that by fasting we earn something or are better than those who don’t? Sure. But something can be beneficial without being required; and if the

¹ Zechariah 8:19-23. All quotes are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

² Leviticus 16:29.

³ 2 Samuel 12:15-16.

⁴ Esther 4:15-16.

⁵ Matthew 6:17.

⁶ Acts 13:1-3.

fear of abuse stops us from use, then we would need to quit eating food, yes, even studying God's Word, since both of these can be, yes, *have been misused and abused!*

In our text, Zechariah mentions four fasts that were not commanded by God, but were agreed upon by the worshipping community. They were set aside by the returning exiles as days of public mourning and repentance: commemorating Babylon's capture of Jerusalem, the dismantling and destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the assassination of Gedaliah, and the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem. Certainly fasting was appropriate on these days if it was being done for the right reasons and not just external acts that were being done to buy God's favor, acts which inculcate pride for doing them instead of being a lesson in spiritual humility.

Interestingly, what first brought about the discussion of these fasts was the fact that the people had returned from exile and the temple was being rebuilt. Yet, they were still under a foreign ruler. So they wondered if they were still under the covenant curses and God's wrath, or were they under His grace, forgiveness, and blessing once again? And this critical question was being reflected then in a simpler, more visible question: Did they still need to fast on these days?

Since Ash Wednesday we have heard Zechariah, the Holy Week Prophet. While noting that he had numerous prophecies of the Lord's sacrifice for the sin of His people, there is no direct prophecy of the Messiah's resurrection. Yet, that does not mean it is not there. How can we say that? Is it just something we say is there in blind hope? Absolutely not! For the prophet speaks the Lord's word: that their fasts will be "seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts."

Fasting gives way to feasting. A feast is a celebration. But what is being celebrated? The end of the fasts? Not really. Fasts were solemn remembrances of God's anger upon their sins, His justice upon their unfaithfulness. While they could just quit fasting, that could not bring feasting since the reality and consequences of their sins could not be removed just by stopping their fasts. No. The only way joy and gladness and cheerful feasts could replace the fasting is if their sins that had brought God's judgment upon them were forgiven and they were cleansed.

And this is exactly what would happen when the Lord was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, when the Good Shepherd was struck, when God Himself was pierced and His blood flowed to become a cleansing fountain all of which Zechariah prophesied. The Messiah needing to die to save sinners from the just condemnation their sins deserve? Absolutely, as no other sacrifice could pay the price of sin. But the Messiah staying dead? That would mean that God did not accept the atoning sacrifice and so sinners are not forgiven and remain condemned.

Zechariah's prophecies, which looked forward to Jesus' sacrifice, always proclaimed it as successful. Why? Because the Savior would not stay dead! Christ is risen and alive! Thus St. Paul writes, "Jesus our Lord...was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."⁷ And with Jesus' resurrection from the dead fasting turns to feasting.

Even if we didn't fast during Lent, it was still a time of figurative fasting. A time to lament that it was "my fault, my own fault, my own grievous fault" that caused Jesus' torture, torment, and death. Anything less is a lie. But it is also our greatest comfort. For if your sins and sinful nature

⁷ Romans 4:25.

did not put Jesus on the cross, then His sacrifice did not pay for them! So in sincere humble sorrow we confess our sins which put Him on the cross. But then in confident humble faith we trust that He did truly bear them, paid their awful load, and so has redeemed us because He has risen from the dead, leaving sin, death, and the devil crushed under His resurrected feet!

The Judeans wondered, “Do we still need to fast after returning to the land and the temple being rebuilt?” We Christians wonder, “Do we still need to fast since the Lord Jesus is risen from the dead?” In the strict sense of fasting, abstaining from food, the answer is “No, since there is no divine command to fast.” But if fasting is taken as a part of and a picture for repentance, which it historically has, then *yes*, fasting needs to continue. And the “fast” of repentance is not merely for Lent, but is a daily reality for any true believer. For faith in Christ assumes repentance, sorrow over sin and turning away from it, not willingly continuing in it. If that fast of repentance is not present, then neither is faith, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, nor eternal life.

Yet, even this fasting, while containing true sorrow, is not without joy. For our fast is not done in uncertainty, but in confidence. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”⁸ Just consider how we come to the Holy Communion. We come fasting, that is, repenting of our sins. But we come to the Lord’s Table, to feast on His Supper, the risen Lord’s body given and blood shed. Jesus gives us this meal for the very purpose to calm our accusing conscience and to strengthen our faith in His sacrifice for us, the forgiveness of our sins, and all other blessings that it has won for us.

In this life we will continue both fasting and feasting. But then why does Zechariah say fasting is gone, replaced by feasting? It is as we have heard throughout this Lenten season: his prophecies, like so many in Scripture, look forward not only to Christ’s first coming, but also His second. For when He returns on the Last Day, raises the bodies of believers in imitation of His own glorious body, and brings His people into the new heavens and earth, then shall be fulfilled the promises of the end of all fasting. For then we shall be fully free from all sin over which we still must fast now. Then we shall have never-ending “seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts,” for we shall be forever partaking in the marriage feast of the Lamb which never ends.⁹

Zechariah prophesied that unbelievers would witness the joy of God’s people, see that God is with them, and so would take hold of the edge of their robe in order to be led into God’s presence and become recipients of His blessings too.

Dear Christians, your God is with *you*. He is with you because Jesus’ sacrifice has broken down the condemning wall of sin between Him and you. His Holy Spirit fills you, giving you new life now even as He is the “down payment” of eternal blessings to come. You have God’s saving Word. You have protection and provision for your body and soul. You have the certainty of resurrection and eternal life in glory. *This is certain because Jesus is risen from the dead!*

God command us, His redeemed people, “Love truth and peace.” Love the truth of His Word by rejecting anything that *even remotely* contradicts it. Love peace by living in peace with fellow

⁸ 1 John 1:9.

⁹ See Revelation 19:7, 9.

believers, and even unbelievers as far as possible.¹⁰ Let the promise that your God is with you fill your faith with confidence and make your joy in Christ overflow that others may see it. And seeing it, desire to join with all of us in worship of the Triune God so that He would be with them as well, guiding, protecting and blessing them, through faith in Jesus, *the living Lord*.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

¹⁰ E.g. Romans 12:18; Galatians 6:10.