

# THE JOYFUL FEAST

**LOVE**  
God  
Neighbor  
Enemy

**PASTOR CHARLIE BERTHOUD**

**ISAIAH 25:6-9**

Sunday, April 5, 2026

“The Joyful Feast” | Isaiah 25:6-9 | Pastor Charlie Berthoud

In the past month, we set a record, twice. Two time we did something that I don't think previously happened in my 13 years here at Covenant.

Every Sunday, we share our joys and concerns with each other, and we celebrate a new birth with a red rose, and we remember the death of a member or a loved one with a white rose.

On two different Sundays over the past month, we had seven white roses. Seven. I don't remember previously having more than four on any given Sunday. Lots of people are grieving and struggling right now, even on Easter Sunday, resurrection Sunday.



And all those white roses don't even include all the people who are struggling with uncertainty over money or health or relationships. And the roses don't include people who are anxious about war or the possible demise of our democracy.

Just because we dress up in nice clothes, we sing festive Easter songs, we enjoy the beautiful flowers, we eat the chocolate and jelly beans... life doesn't magically become free of pain. Life is still hard, even today.

The reality is that every day, even Easter, is a mix of joy and sadness.

The women at the tomb experienced the same thing. At the beginning of worship, you heard the Easter reading from Matthew 28, one of the biblical accounts of resurrection. The text tells us that the women left the tomb with fear and great joy.

And we see the same mix of sadness and joy in the Bible, in the meals that surround the resurrection of Jesus.

On Thursday evening, we remembered the Last Supper in our worship service here, reflecting on the betrayal of Jesus, the denial of Jesus, and the arrest of Jesus. Shortly after the meal Jesus is tried and executed on a cross. The Last Supper is a sad and somber meal.

But as the gospels tell us after the resurrection, Jesus had meals with his disciples where the disciples experienced surprise and joy at the presence of Jesus in the flesh. In Luke, we see that after a long walk on the road to Emmaus, two disciples broke bread with Jesus. And in John we see that after a long night of fishing, the disciples shared a meal with Jesus on the beach.

We have another meal-themed reading today.

The reading comes from the prophet Isaiah, who lived over 700 years before Jesus. His visionary words foreshadow a heavenly feast.

The words of Isaiah inspired the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, the lengthy chapter about resurrection, where he wrote about death being swallowed up and about a time of no more tears.

Perhaps most important is that the feast described by Isaiah isn't just for the religious people or for the people of a certain nation, but for everyone.

Listen for God's word from the prophet Isaiah on this Easter Sunday.

“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the covering that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, “See, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

Two thousand years ago, Jesus was born in a remote corner of the Roman Empire, and during his life of preaching and teaching and healing, he prioritized several things:

- Seek first God's Kingdom, God's Reign. Realize that God's ways are not the ways of the world. Do not conform to the ways of Empire. Jesus taught repeatedly about God's kingdom and God's justice and righteousness. He taught us to pray “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done.”
- Care for the lost, the least, and the last. In Luke 4, we see that Jesus began his ministry saying that God had anointed him to proclaim good news to the poor, and in Matthew 25, Jesus says “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” And his deeds, matched his teaching.
- Live with purpose: Jesus called people to repent, change directions, to wake up, to turn away from evil, and to follow Jesus into a new way: loving neighbor and even enemy, being courageous in challenging circumstances. Jesus called people to into new purpose, helping us all to see that our lives can make a difference for good.

## Teaching of Jesus

1. Seek first God's kingdom, God's reign
2. Care for the lost, the least, the last
3. Live with purpose



Rather than spending all his time teaching in the synagogue or at Jerusalem University, Jesus shared his message at meal time and by sharing meals with all sorts of people.

He ate with the Pharisees and his disciples. He multiplied loaves and fishes so that thousands of people could eat. And, he freely ate with so-called sinners, which resulted in a lot

of anger from the political and religious leaders. Some scholars half-jokingly say that Jesus was crucified for bad table manners.

Because he was a threat to the religious and political leaders of his day, Jesus was put to death, on a cross—a brutal and painful form of punishment.

However, as the Bible proclaims, on the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus together proclaim to us:

- God knows the reality of suffering
- Sin is forgiven
- Death is not the final word

In the midst of ongoing sadness and struggles of life, Easter gives us strength and courage to keep going, with the hope that somehow, some way things will get better.

Presbyterian author Frederick Buechner says it well: “The worst isn't the last thing about the world. It's the next to the last thing. The last thing is the best.”

There are plenty of “worst things” in our lives. With Easter, we look forward to the last things. And we try to make the most of where we are now. Singing helps.

At the conclusion of worship, after we celebrate our resurrection meal, we're singing one of my favorite Easter hymns: Christ is Risen, Shout Hosanna.”

The final verse invites us to courageously defy the power of sin and sadness;

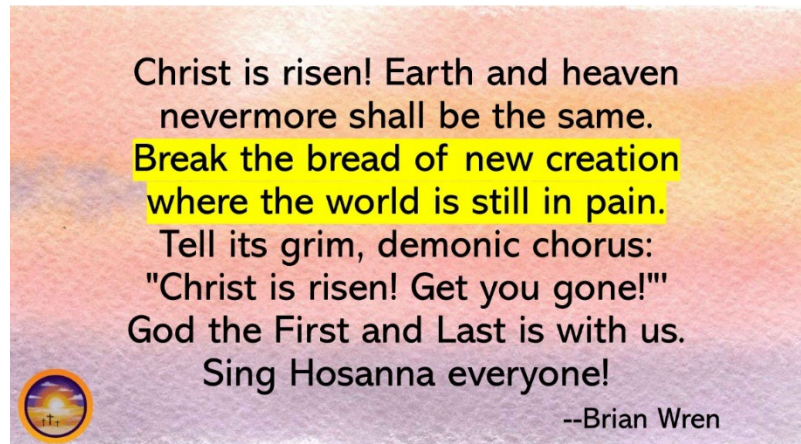
“Tell its grim demonic chorus, Christ is risen, get ye gone.”

In other words, God's love is stronger than anything, so all the evil and bad things can just get the heck outta here.

And to have the strength to stand up to evil, the hymn calls us to “break the bread of new creation where the world is still in pain.”

With communion, we are breaking the bread of new creation, as we will do soon.

And we break the bread of new creation elsewhere, like after a loved one dies.



Think about it: when you hear about a friend who is grieving, you consider bringing them a casserole, a cake, a pizza, a gift card...

After pretty much every funeral, there is a reception with food, where there is a mix of tears and laughter, sadness and joy. Sharing food after a death feels like “breaking the bread of new creation.”

At a recent funeral reception, the meal was catered by Panera, because that was a favorite destination of the deceased. At other receptions, I’ve seen favorite candy, ice cream, potato chips, and more.

These are like little resurrection meals, because the food connects us with the loved ones no longer physically with us.

We encourage people to talk with loved ones about the reality of death and to make plans. One more item to add to the list: what kind of food would be appropriate at your reception.

My mom died in 2014, and her three sons and her four grandsons all loved her famous chocolate chip cookies. I’ve enjoyed those cookies since I was a kid. It wasn’t until sometime in my 20s that I realized that mom’s famous cookies were nothing more than Pillsbury slice and bakes.

To this day, whenever I have one of those chemically-enhanced, scientifically designed to taste good, preservative laden cookies, I think of my mom and smile. It’s like a little resurrection feast.



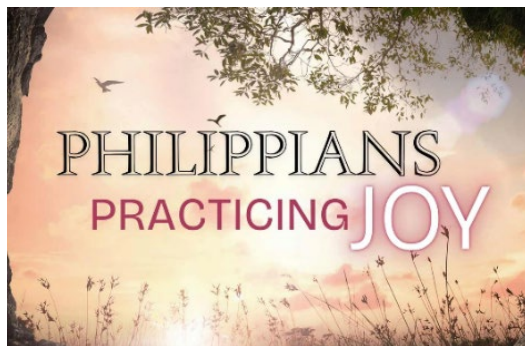
If I could get a do-over, I would have sliced and baked a few hundred of those cookies for the reception after her funeral.

So, if a nutritionally void cookie can be a hint of resurrection, maybe we need to be more mindful about our eating, to be aware that even a simple meal could be breaking the bread of new creation.

Toward that end, let me suggest a few ways to break the bread of new creation in this Easter season.

- Pray. If you don't already, just pause and say "thank you, God". We can thank God for the taste and for the gift of being alive.
- Remember there are hungry and hurting people. Food is meant to be shared as Jesus showed us. We share with our food pantries and our mission dollars. And in our lonely and hurting world, one of the best things you can do right now is invite someone over for a meal, or invite someone out for coffee, or make room at the school lunch table.
- Enjoy your food. Eat joyfully. Joy is breaking the bread of new creation where the world is still in pain.

Joy is being able to see the big picture to acknowledge that things may not be great right now, and they might actually be very hard right now. "Practicing joy" is our theme moving into the Easter season, over the next six weeks, as we read the little book of Philippians together, a letter that Paul wrote from jail.



Joy is a choice, standing against the sadness and pain of the world and saying: "This is the day the Lord has made I will rejoice and be glad in in."

So, let's eat and share food with joy. After our resurrection meal here today, some of you may be having Easter brunch at the fanciest restaurants in Madison. Some of you might be having reheated leftovers that have been in your refrigerator too long.

Whatever you eat today or this week, I pray that you enjoy it and I pray that it nourishes you to live with faith, hope, and love. Amen.

### **Blessing**

We have broken the bread of new creation

And we go into a world with too much pain

For the sake of each of us and for the sake of the world,

May the God of resurrection and second chances bless you

With courage and wisdom, with faith, hope, love and joy.

Christ is risen! Alleluia Amen.