

Easter Day 2016 Sermon

A few years ago, I walked into Walmart early in Lent, and I saw a message printed on large banners hanging from the ceiling and plastered on displays of jelly bean eggs, chocolate bunnies, and marshmallow chicks. The message said: “More Easter for your money. Guaranteed.”

I find it interesting that, unlike the furor over whether certain store employees can or cannot greet customers with, “Merry Christmas,” there seems to be little hesitancy on the part of stores and commercial companies regarding Easter, which should probably be a tip-off for us that the public as a whole doesn’t place that much religious meaning in Easter. Easter is – well, it’s a celebration of Spring, and a time to purchase candy. Last year, the week before Easter beat out Halloween as the most lucrative week of the year for candy retailers. Americans purchased 146 million pounds of candy in the week before Easter last year. That’s nearly half a pound of candy for every man, woman and child in the country. (<http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/272969>) With potential profits like that, *every* store wants you to buy your half-pound of candy for each member of your family *from them*, so Walmart goes all out in advertising, “More Easter for your money. Guaranteed.”

Now, I have no problem with Easter candy; we host an egg hunt ourselves here at the church! But the Easter Walmart is selling is **not** the Easter we celebrate here today. Those of you who observed Maundy Thursday and Good Friday know that they have little to do with candy and bunnies; and Easter is an inseparable part of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. The message of Easter is, “Out of suffering and death comes new life, a new reality, a new creation.”

“More Easter for your money. Guaranteed.”

The Easter we celebrate today is not *sold*, at **any** price, but rather is offered and given freely to any and all who would receive it. I would even say that you’ve already been given the gift, but you may not know you have it.

That *doesn’t* mean that Jesus’ Easter isn’t costly, of course. It cost Jesus everything. He gave up his divine status to be born as one of us in a lowly manger. Out of love for you and me, he lived a fully human life among us, a life of love, forgiveness, and compassion, surrendered to his Father’s will, pouring out that life in self-giving service to others. At the end, all of his friends forsook him and ran away, and one betrayed him. He was flogged within an inch of his life, and then crucified.

Jesus’ Easter cost him everything.

And to be honest, Jesus’ Easter, while **freely** offered to you and me, will cost *us*, too. If we decide to receive this priceless gift of life lived in the fellowship of

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it will cost us our self-will, our ego, our self-centeredness, our self-righteousness. It will cost us time spent in daily prayer, in community with fellow Christians in worship, and in generous service of others. It will cost us the grudges and hurts we hold onto, our unforgiveness – and much more.

But I think that we as faithful Christians **can** agree with *part* of Wal-Mart's slogan, and make it our own – a rallying cry of sorts. Not “More Easter for your money”, but simply: “More Easter!”

Yes, let's have more Easter! Not of the chocolate-and-marshmallow kind, but of the loving kind that Jesus lived while he walked this earth, the kind that the **Risen** Christ *still* lives in the hearts of his faithful followers today! Let's have life transformed from pettiness into generosity of spirit. Life less concerned about what I am getting out of it and more concerned about what I am giving and sharing. Life less judgmental and more forgiving; less concerned with being entertained and more with becoming the person God created us to be; more giving of our time without feeling put-upon; more aware of the needs of others; more conscious of being good members of Christ's community of faith, the church, into which we were initiated at our baptism; more willing to *serve* than to **be** served. Let's have less incivility and terrorism and prejudice and violence and hatred and group polarization and more of the love of God lived out in our lives.

Not “More Easter for your money”, but “More Easter!”, period! Participating in the life of the risen Christ, which is ours for the taking – which we already have, if we would but recognize it, nurture it, and live it!

“The best proof that Christ has risen,” wrote Louis Evely, “is that he is still alive. And for the immense majority of our contemporaries, the only way of seeing him alive is for us Christians to love one another.” When we love one another as he loved us, as he commanded us on Maundy Thursday, there **will** be more Easter! “The same power that brought Christ back from the dead is [still] operative today within those who are Christ's. The Resurrection is an ongoing thing.” (Leon Morris)

Easter is not one day, but an ongoing thing.

And so, why not participate in it? Why not commit yourself today to More Easter? More participation in the life, spirit, and consciousness of the risen Christ? More participation in the worship and work of Christ's community, Christ's body, the Church? More participation in the healing, saving, forgiving acts of Christ amongst the broken, grieving, and needy in our world? More kindness, generosity, gratitude?

The empty tomb proclaims to us that Easter is an ongoing thing, and our Scriptures promise us that *participating* in More Easter, will bring us into depths of joy, meaning, forgiveness and love we can only begin to imagine.

Guaranteed, for eternity.

AMEN