

A Panamanian Perspective on Holy Week

Since I spent nearly 30 years in Panama as a missionary, I have a perspective on Easter that I trust has taught me some valuable lessons.

First off, Holy Week in the early years (1970s-1980s) tended to be influenced by Roman Catholicism, the predominant religion in Panama. The entire week was somewhat subdued, with less emphasis on the commercial aspects of life. Good Friday was somber and solemn; television and radio stations could only play, funeral-like music, dirges, and the like. Churches had mass to commemorate the passion. There were no sports or entertainment. (After those early years, Good Friday became more "secular," and has remained so. It is possible that some radio stations may have special solemn programming, but not the TV stations, by and large. Some of the older people, staunchly Catholic, complained, but basically the day has become a "holiday," not a "holy day.")

Strangely enough, Easter Sunday was pretty much business as usual. Though it was called "Domingo de Gloria," (Sunday of Glory), there didn't seem to be a lot of celebration of Christ's resurrection, and folks went to the beach, had picnics, visited family, etc., pretty much like any other time when they were off work. But neither the solemnity or the frivolity seemed to touch people very deeply. The solemnity didn't cause people to come to Christ for forgiveness of sin, and receive a Savior who would change their lives. The frivolity wasn't Christian joy, based on the the certainty of the Risen Lord who had conquered death.

What a difference I discovered in the evangelical church! For one thing, many churches had a special Good Friday service which featured the seven last words of Christ he uttered from

the cross. I took part in many of those over the years, sometimes preaching just one of the seven words, as in a joint service, and sometimes all seven. It could make for a very long service, but focusing from a theological as well as a practical perspective was helpful and challenging.

We sang songs (in Spanish) like "There is a Fountain," and "Nothing But the Blood." We also sang songs about the passion such as "Oh Qué Amor," (Oh What Love), and "¿Sabes qué Murió Jesús?" (Do you Know that Jesus Died?) this last one sung to the tune of the 1960s pop song "Sealed With a Kiss." Beautiful, melodic songs about our Savior's death on the cross that really touched my heart, but unknown to English-only speaking people.

Easter Sunday was always a special day in Panama. We'd sing, in Spanish of course, songs like "Low in the Grave He Lay" with volume and emotion, and hear the resurrection message delivered on that day of days.

We introduced to the church in Bethania, where we served for about 15 years, the "Sunrise Service" concept. I think some other churches already were doing it, but it was new to many of the people we'd seen come to Christ, and over time came to be one of the most popular and inspiring things we did each year. An early service, often around 5:30 or 6:00 a.m., followed by a breakfast fellowship meal, and then Sunday School, made for a glorious day in the Lord, and with His people.

I remember our first Easter in Panama, in 1978, when we met at the church on a Sunday night. It would have been March 26. Our main service was held on Sunday night at the beginning of the church plant. We sang. We prayed. I preached. At the end of the service a young man in his early 20s came forward to receive Christ. His words to me were these: "I knew there had to be more in life than what I had found, and tonight I found it in Jesus Christ." Christ arose! He lives! He is risen. He

is risen indeed!

Easter Poll: What Is Your Favorite Easter Food?

Eating is fun. Food is good. Is there anyone out there that is going to argue with those two statements? As Americans, we love to eat. We will use any event as an excuse to eat. Here at REO, we respect and honor that tradition. So, in light of our shared love of food and eating, we have prepared a poll to determine the most important part of the Easter dinner. Every family will have its own unique spin on what you eat at Easter, so in an attempt to keep this as simple as possible, we have decided to use the most common dishes found in Easter dinners all over the country. You only get one vote. Vote for your favorite. Some of the options are as general as possible to include the most possible responses. See “potatoes” for instance. If you have a specific potato dish that is your favorite, vote for “potatoes” and then post your dish in the comment section. If you can’t find any option that works for you, select “other” and explain your selection in the comment section. If that is too difficult for you, then you are very lazy.

Let’s hear it people! What is your favorite part of the Easter dinner?


Favorite Easter Dinner Food

- Ham

- Potatoes
- Pie
- Other Dessert
- Casserole
- Vegetable of some sort
- Deviled Eggs
- Alternative Meat option
- Candy (Who cares about the food when you have candy?)
- Other

Vote

[View Results](#)

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The Tick Tock

A little away
the clock tick tocks
the time where
we know He knows
it tick tocks
the clock rocks

away
when all was lost
He left the stars
where love is lush to
touch our hands,
our heads, our souls,

standing
in His thunder
underneath in

the nothingness
of our ticking,
in the sea of our tocking,
in the ticking, the tocking,

away
when life was lost
and deliverance
crossed into our
land where love is losing,
where He touches our hands, our heads, our souls,
where He views this sphere so

away
ticking, tocking,
our sides
plumped with bumps
and clumps and thorny lumps
far away
from His sigh
of mercy,
of death, His death,
of life, His life,
of the tick tock
the clock rocks
today.

Easter Refocused

In his latest book, *If You Can Keep It: The Forgotten Promise of American Liberty*, Eric Metaxas recounts a story of his family's Greek Orthodox tradition of welcoming Easter morning with a ceremony of darkness, light, candles, and expectation.

Reading his description moved me. It is not a tradition that I am familiar with, but its truth speaks in a language I have understood since I was a child. It is a beautiful, poetic ritual pointing to the Great Light that rose from the dead on that first Easter morning.

Next Saturday, my church will celebrate Easter by hosting an egg hunt, games, free food, and a brief explanation to our visitors as to why we gather on a weekend morning to do all those things. The Gospel will be shared that morning, hopefully with many who have never accepted Easter as anything more than bunny rabbits, eggs, and food. We will do our part that morning to provide a glimpse of the true story at the center of the Easter celebration.

Family traditions. Egg hunts. Rituals. Good Friday services. Easter lunches. Sunrise services. These things, a blend of sacred and secular, make up a good deal of how most of us will spend Easter weekend. The holy, Scripture-inspired traditions will walk hand in hand with the earthy, silly, and seemingly insignificant. What value do these traditions and customs and rituals possess? Should egg hunts and sunrise services coexist on a church calendar? Should Easter lunches and Good Friday communion cohabitate in the lives of believers? Yes and no. Or perhaps better said, yes, in the right manner. While the church's easy absorption of mostly harmless, yet potentially distracting activities has ever been a point of contention and conversation, I do believe that there is a messy beauty to our uniquely American Easter celebrations. But it is a beauty that needs to be examined and evaluated, never leaving things to chance and the whims of the culture at large.

Our view of Easter...

I would guess, that to most of our country, Easter is all about egg hunts, candy, chocolate, the Easter Bunny, and food. Lots of food. While most Americans would recognize the true

“reason for the season” it is not a part of their lives in any significant way. The crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is at best an afterthought. And at worst, a sanctimonious intrusion into their lives. And while most of us that are regular church goers claim to embrace the deeper meaning of Easter, our actions, activities, and traditions do little to support that claim. This is not a self-righteous judgment on my part. I am guilty of this as well, and have been for too long. Easter is the moment our faith became reality. Easter celebrates the singular event that remade the world, tearing the veil between God and man, yet I am more excited about what food we will be eating on Sunday afternoon. I look forward to my church’s egg hunt more than I do the Good Friday service the night before. And I am convinced that I am not alone in this. We have allowed these little side items to overwhelm the meal. The main dish sits there, virtually uneaten because we have become so consumed with the sugary sweets and delectable treats heaped on our plates. If Easter is ever to rise to prominence again, in our lives or the life of our nation, we have work to do.

A few suggestions...

Everything we do, whether it be during Easter, Christmas, or any other holy celebration, should point to Christ. I realize that is basic stuff. I’m not breaking any ground here. This has been said, and said better, by many before me. It will be said, and said better, by many after me. But the point stands: the church has lost the primacy of Easter because we stopped focusing on Christ. Or better said: Our view of Easter has been diminished because we stopped using everything at our disposal to point to the empty tomb.

I hope this doesn’t come across as some crass attempt to use the name of Jesus to make things more “Christian.” I have never been a fan of slapping Jesus on things to make them more holy or spiritual. It cheapens His name and turns it into a good luck charm or talisman. In our effort to be approachable,

we've made "Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words." our defining attribute. It's our unspoken battle cry. The problem is, if we rarely use words, we might miss some perfect opportunities to actually share the Gospel. I'm not knocking that phrase or the truth behind it. Our lives should be a living, breathing restatement of the Gospel to everyone we encounter. There are times, though, that we are served up divine opportunities to say the words that can save, and we don't because we are afraid of coming across as pushy. Or we don't want our friends and neighbors that come to our Easter egg hunt to feel like we tricked them. Sorry, that's not good enough. One should never apologize for sharing the Good News.

In your homes, share the Gospel. Teach the truth of the old, old story when you hunt for eggs or when you eat ham, potatoes, casseroles, and pies. Don't assume the value and importance of Easter is clear to your family. Make the day about Jesus and His resurrection. Make it about your salvation through His sacrifice. Talk about it. Don't leave the truth unspoken. Speak it loud and often.

In your church, if you have visitors on your campus, many who are probably un-churched and unsaved, please, please share the Gospel with words. Don't be afraid of being perceived as pushy. Don't be afraid of poor reactions. The Gospel is a folly to those who are perishing. Share the truth with grace and love, but share it with words and clarity. There will be some that need to hear it that very day. Don't miss that because you want to be more approachable or non-threatening.

In your day-to-day, focus on Christ and prepare your heart for Easter. There is no greater intrusion of the fallen world than the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Jehovah God reached down into the natural order of things, and He broke it. He ripped it apart. He sacrificed His Son on the altar of humanity's sin. He plunged His Son into the earth and into the Fall's reward. Three days later, He reached through rock and

stone, sin and shame, Hell and judgment, and shattered the unbreakable wall of separation. The earth cried out in thanksgiving. The angels lifted their voices in incomparable praise. Jesus, the very Son of God, had subjugated death and the grave. And now we, the very root and cause of our suffering, the very reason for death's primacy, the very source of the impenetrable wall, we can raise our hands in thankful praise and cry out, "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

That's it. That's the whole thing. What it's all about. Don't lose sight of that because you are distracted by eggs, food, candlelight vigils and the rest. Let us keep our eyes on Jesus and make Him the primary focus this Easter.

Resurrection Dawning: An Easter Portrait

Happy Easter!

That does not seem good enough to express how Easter should make us feel though, does it? Happy is good, but it fails to capture everything Easter means. How can we ever say enough? How can we articulate everything the Resurrection is and everything it represents, not only for us as believers, but for the entire world? The simple answer is, we can't. We simply do not have the words. We do not have it in us to tell the story better than it has already been told. Scripture

tells the story with words and images and power. It tells us of the bruised heel and the crushed head. The sinless lamb slain for the sins of the world. Powerful imagery that we cannot hope to top.

So, instead of trying to do the impossible, we have chosen to simply add our voices to the throngs of past and present believers that have proudly proclaimed the joy of Easter. We hope what little we have to contribute will be a blessing to you on this truly blessed Easter morning.



Ethan – age 11

I am astounded just as much by the incredibly long working of God's plan of salvation as by the final culmination of the saving acts of Jesus. I have already talked in [The Moral Essential of Being](#) how there was a whole lot of time involved in the road to salvation before the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. In fact, God said he was making plans before the world's timeline even started. And when time did begin, Jesus was there and involved in that act of world creation. John 1:1-3 says the Word (Jesus Christ) was with God and was God [in the beginning](#). And it wasn't just Jesus who worked the centuries-long plan. The other two members of the trinity—God the Father and God the Holy Spirit—were also there and were equally as pivotal in the long work of salvation.

Although it may be the most important piece, the role the

incarnate Son of God played between His human birth and His final ascension into heaven wasn't His final piece of the puzzle. And the Holy Spirit's role certainly did not end with helping conceive Jesus in the womb of the virgin Mary. Nor did the hand of God the Father withdraw after the work of Christ on earth was done. The three persons of the godhead are still completing the Easter story today and forevermore.

It is true that right now there are still burrs and bellyaching and holy outrage in this earthly life even for Christians. But on Easter day we are celebrating the beginning of a redemption and renewal of all things toward a time when all the imperfections of life will be no more. Revelation 21:4 tells us that in that glorious, final day God will wipe away our tears. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. All the burrs and bellyaching and holy outrage will ever after be a thing of the past. I long for that day.

– Ben Plunkett



Aidan – age 13

The thing about Easter is that it was so empirical. We talk about faith all the time in Christianity, but that word must be quantified by history and evidence and transmission. Make no mistake, the fact that the early apostles saw the resurrected Jesus is crucial to the story.

Over and over and over in the book of Acts you find the

disciples emphasizing the word "witness" to describe resurrection (Acts 2:32, 3:15, 5:31-33, 10:39-41, 13:29-31, 26:16). It mattered to picking Judas' replacement, evangelism and so much more. Jesus and Ananias in Acts used the word "witness" to refer to how Christians would share Christ with others. (And while we witness based on what we believe today, they witnessed based on what they saw.) In 2 Peter 1:16, Peter uses the word "witness" to attest to his words being fact. And Luke begins and ends with eyewitnesses being the source of his Gospel, book-ending the story of Jesus by emphasizing empirical proof. Additionally, the Apostles creed in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 says four times that Jesus "appeared." The focus on this fact is vitally important to our faith.

But Jesus said something to Thomas that I think we need to remember lest we bemoan the fact we were not so "Blessed" to see Jesus just as they did. In John 20, He told Thomas that "You believe because you see. But blessed are those who do not see yet still believe." Our belief is not blind, but neither is it without testimony that was verified by sight, sound, smell and touch. I believe Jesus walked the earth, died and rose because of my faith. But not without evidence.

And this and every Easter I don't want to try to bring God down to my level, but neither do I want to check my mind at the door as I worship. What I know effects what I feel. I have broken down and cried numerous times thinking about those 11 men and countless others giving their lives for what they saw. And that is why Easter is so special.

– Gowdy Cannon



Wesley – age 6

Humans were never created for death.

When my Aunt Lisa was tragically killed in a car accident leaving a husband and two young boys, I couldn't believe it. I was in college away from home, and my grandma told me the news over the phone. "No!" I replied. "This isn't real," I thought. I'll never forget seeing my precious grandma who had lost her daughter saying to the casket, "I'll see you later."

The next Sunday at church, my grandma requested the hymn "Because He Lives."

My sister-in-law died from breast cancer in 2015, less than two weeks after a confirmed diagnosis. She left a husband and three very young children. I still responded, "No. This can't be real." Her memorial service was simple. Songs. Poetry. Scripture. A beautiful tribute by her best friend. It still seems unreal that Bethany is not here.

The speaker at her service used Truth and reminded us mourners, "Things are not always as they seem."

Humans were never created for death, and maybe this is why it doesn't seem real when it happens.

Humanity chose death. To sin is to choose death, but God became man to die in our place, to redeem all of us. Because of His sinlessness, death could not stick. Death is the payment for sin, and He had never purchased it. We get to

choose Jesus' death for our sins and Jesus' perfect, righteous, sinless life for our own lives. We get to choose eternal life.

This sacred holiday reminds us HE LIVES! Screams to us that death is not the end! Proclaims hope when tragedy attempts to suck it away.

Because HE LIVES, we can face tomorrow.

We were never created for death. And though humanity chose it, God made certain through His own sacrifice and resurrection that we have another choice. A choice at life.

Happy Easter!

– Amy Lytle



Wesley – age 6

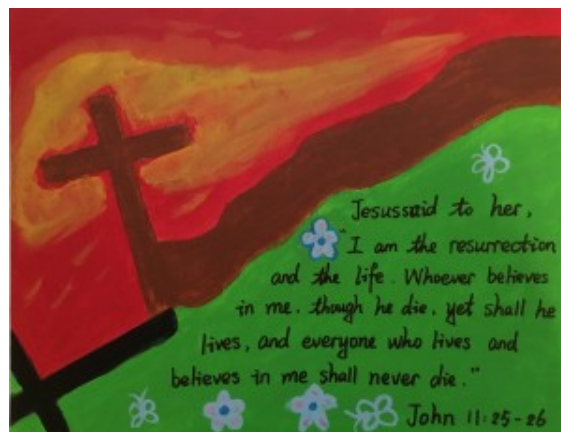
I want to be an Easter person.

I love Easter, but I do not love it enough. I am a Christmas person. I love that time of year. I love the lights, the decorations, the music, the food. I love the reason behind it all even more. The story of the Nativity is miraculous in its depth and power. For whatever reason, I have never felt that same pull for Easter. And that bothers me.

My wife has been a big proponent of making Easter a much bigger deal in our home. We are even planning to scale back on

Christmas so we can do more for Easter each year. I want my children to recognize the singular importance of the Easter story. Without it, we have nothing. Without the death, burial and resurrection, we are without hope. Perhaps by focusing on it more and talking about it more and celebrating it more we will show our kids its great importance. I hope it works for me as well. I want to be an Easter person.

– Phill Lytle



Denkie – age 17

I recently heard that Christmas points to Easter. Jesus was born to die so that he could defeat death. I don't normally like thinking about Christmas songs outside the month of December but here I make an exception. This is a watercolor painting inspired by a few lines from Joy to the World. "No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground, He comes to make his blessings flow, Far as the curse is found." This is an abstract that flashed in my mind as I pondered "Far as the curse is found." However far the ever-reverberating echoes of the fall can branch out, the resurrection overcomes—as far as the curse can be found!

–

Brandon

Atwood



Have a wonderful and happy Easter!
The Rambling Ever On staff

Phases of Grace

I. Death

After He sighed His last,
the dead came out
to bat their eyes and survived,
the earth revived.

The light
of God passed into

the fields,
the whitewashed fields.

The land survived,
the land revived.

II. Resurrection

There were burrs and
bellyaching
and holy outrage
in our dying race
in need of grace.

And grace is in
a tomb and a tree,
my brothers and sisters,
in a time that is free.

Death was on the earth,
it did not realize,
it did not recognize,
it will not survive.

III. Everlasting Life

There are still burrs and
bellyaching
and holy outrage

as men and women gallivant
from here to there all nonchalant,

and
cities coil with selfish boys
and girls.

But He sighed and
we came out
to bat our eyes,
we revive,

we will survive.

Why Should Christmas Have All the Good Music?: Celebrating Easter Music

Why do radio stations (sacred and secular alike) play Christmas songs for the entire month of December, yet you have to search high and low to find any station playing Easter music? Why do churches sing Christmas songs every Sunday in December, yet we are lucky if we sing one song each Sunday that includes the story of the Resurrection? I might be overstating things a bit, but I think you get my point.


We have done a poor job of making Easter the preeminent Christian celebration on the calendar. We treat it as if it is almost just another Sunday. Shame on us! As you might have noticed, we here at Rambling Ever On feel that Easter is without equal. Of all Holy days, we should celebrate this one more fully and more passionately. So, to that end, here are some of our favorite Easter themed songs and hymns. Vote for your three favorites. Or, you can vote for the "Other" option and list your favorites in the comment section.

Let us celebrate Easter. Let us look forward to it as we do Christmas. Because without Easter, Christmas is just a nice story about a poor young woman giving birth to a baby in a foreign town.

Pick your 3 favorite Easter songs.

- In Christ Alone (17%, 16 Votes)
- Up From The Grave He Arose (13%, 12 Votes)
- How Deep The Father's Love For Us (12%, 11 Votes)
- Glorious Day (Living He Loved Me) (11%, 10 Votes)
- Because He Lives (10%, 9 Votes)
- Christ the Lord is Risen Today (8%, 7 Votes)
- Other (8%, 7 Votes)
- Was It a Morning Like This? (7%, 6 Votes)
- Because He Lives (Amen) (Matt Maher version) (5%, 5 Votes)
- There is a Fountain (5%, 5 Votes)
- Easter Song (4%, 4 Votes)

Total Voters: **34**

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