

First Fruits - Easter Harvest    Leviticus 23:1, 4-14    1 Corinthians 15:20 16:15

Last year I started an above ground garden. I spent a lot of money on getting the right soil and forming the right wood structure. Then I bought some seeds at Pavilions and planted them in hope. I waited and waited and waited some more, but nothing came up. I planted some of the seeds again a month later in a separate pot and kept it in the house and still nothing came up. I tried again this year. Nothing. Finally I threw the seeds away and promised myself never to buy seeds from Pavilions again.

When a farmer plants a field of seed he wants to make sure there is crop to harvest. A few days before Jesus died, he told his disciples, “unless a seed of wheat falls in the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces a crop of many seeds. Jesus said this about his own death. He saw his death on Good Friday as planting a seed, in the hope that there would be an abundant crop as a result.

And that is the question we are asking today a week after Good Friday and Easter. Where is the crop, where is the Easter harvest? What has Good Friday, the death of the God’s good seed, the seed of his own Son, produced in your life and the life of HIC? And where do we look to see if there is any fruit?

In the book of Leviticus there were seven feasts that made up the worship of God’s people during the year. These feasts if celebrated properly – in spirit and in truth - ushered people into the mind of God and helped them experience God with us – the I AM YHWH. Celebrating God’s festivals helped them enter the glory and blessings of God in the tent of meeting. We have been following along this OT feast pattern as we observed Lent and celebrated Easter as Christians this year. The feast of Passover, the feast of unleavened bread, and the feast of first fruits are a cruise experience package that foreshadows and helps us understand what God, the cosmic farmer, was thinking when he sent his son to die as the Passover Lamb of God for the sins of the world on Good Friday.

Lets flashback. You may remember that at the beginning of Lent God’s people spent 40 days searching for the germs and the yeasts and molds of leaven in their lives and did everything to expel them. Their lives and their homes had to be pure if Passover was to be powerful. Leaven was a spoiling agent that ruins a godly life. And for the people of God to experience the fullness and the power of Passover required a leaven free life. And as we learned a while back Jesus suggested that leaven was sin. And so on that High Holy day of Passover when the people experienced again God’s amazing act of salvation, they did so in a leavenless environment. Passover started the seven day feast of unleavened bread – eating the holy bread of the desert - manna. It was a holy week of celebration and sharing communion meals in worship with people from all over the country. A National festival of Super Sabbath worship. And at the end of the week was the parade

and the game. On that final Sabbath of the festival all the people gathered for the finale sacred assembly one last time and sacrificed the required offerings and ate the special unleavened bread one last time to remind themselves that they were God's holy nation set apart and freed to share the glory of God, and the love of God with others. It was an amazing week of celebration in the presence of God. When Jesus went to Jerusalem for this week long festival for the first time when he was 12, he couldn't get enough of it and stayed even when everyone went home. He wanted to remain in the house of God his father.

After the feast of Passover and unleavened bread the people were inspired and filled with a mountain top presence of God and were ready to return back to their lives of work and service with renewed passion and vision. But on the Monday after that seven day Super Festival the people were required to do one more thing before going home. On the first day of that new week it was the feast of First fruits. On that day they were commanded to bring to the temple or the tent of meeting a sheaf of barley. It was to be the first fruits of the harvest to come. Before eating or selling the new crop the first fruit and the finest of the new crop was to be presented and offered to God in a peace or fellowship offering – in other words a communion meal and given to the priest for the service of the temple. The priests were to wave these sheaves of barley before the Lord in the Holy Place of the Temple. In this way the people dedicated their crops and their lives and the harvest to come to God in response to what God had done for them. And so God blessed the harvest.

It was only after they had offered their first fruits to God and dedicated their crops and their lives to God that they were allowed to eat of their crops or harvest their crop. It was only after this first fruits offering was made that they were allowed to eat leaven bread again and drink wine again.

Now let's fast forward to Jesus day. For many days and in many ways Jesus helped his disciples to get ready to celebrate the feast of Passover – to get ready for the feast of unleavened bread – the feast of eating the bread of life and drinking the cup of the new covenant. He showed them what God was thinking. That the Passover would be finished on the cross once and for all. That the Lamb of God would be planted as a seed in the soil of the nations. That there would be a festival of celebration at the death of Jesus and they would have a special unleavened bread Sabbath that they thought would spell salvation for the people. The Jewish leaders and the Roman official thought that with Jesus out of the way, dead, life would get back to normal. Religion and government could get back to the business of cultural prosperity and peace.

You see these Jewish leaders and these Roman officials forgot about the feast of first fruits. When God plants a seed there is sure to be an abundant crop and an amazing harvest. And so on the first day of the week, on that first work day after the Super

Sabbath while it was still dark the seed that was planted and died on Good Friday began to produce an abundant crop ready for harvest. Good Friday is the feast of Passover - the planting, and Easter is the feast of first fruits – the harvest. Jesus was raised from the dead on first fruits Sunday, and day after the Sabbath. The sheaf of Jesus resurrection body was waved before God as the first fruits of the harvest dedicated to the glory of God and promise of the crop to come.

The Bible teaches us that Jesus is the first fruits sheaf of God harvest. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:20 Christ indeed has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Through Adam and Eve we fell into sin and died. But in Jesus and through Jesus all will be made alive again. First Christ the first fruits, then all those who belong to him. Easter is the festival of first fruits. The festival of the resurrection harvest.

Fast forward to our time. As disciples of Jesus we observed lent and prayed that the Holy Spirit would purify our hearts and make us ready to understand the God's thinking as we participated in Good Friday and Easter. During Holy Week and lent we ate the unleavened bread, relived the story of Jesus passion and his crucifixion, We prayed that the Holy Spirit would help us understand the sins that stand in the way of our friendship with God. To help us understand how we can enjoy atonement with God.

And now on this first fruits Easter Sunday we ask the question: So where is the resurrection Harvest today? Where is fruit of the Passover Lamb who died for us? How is the death and resurrection bearing fruit in your and my life today? Was going through Lent, Holy Week and Easter just a cultural activity to give us something to do and now a week later we are just getting back to the normal business of life? Was Good Friday and Easter like a pack of seed bought at Pavilions?

Where is the fruit we are waving before God today in the hope of the harvest to come?

For the followers of Jesus the resurrection harvest was seen in three areas.

1. In their personal lives. Romans 8:11 When we are raised with Christ the spirit of God is living in us. 22: being led by the Spirit, living as free sons and daughter of God. We who have the first fruits of the Spirit are eagerly awaiting our full adoption, knowing that God works for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose. Supernatural confidence of our adoption as God's children - that produces love, patience, faithfulness and gentleness.
2. Secondly the fruit of Easter is seen in the new believers that are produced among us. In 1 Corinthians 16:15 Paul refers to the new believers who were welcomed into the family of God through the service of the Lord's people as the first fruits of the harvest. The fruit of evangelism.

3. Finally, in Deuteronomy 26 the feast of first fruits is explained in greater detail. The fruit of God's planting and the harvest among his people is seen in the tithes that the people bring to the tent of meeting. The tithes for the upkeep of the church and the poor and the orphan. God said to the People concerning their celebrating the festival of first fruits: "When you have set aside a tenth of all your produce, the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied. Then say to the Lord "I have removed the sacred portion – the tithe - from my house and given it to the Levite, the fatherless, the foreigner, and the widow as you the Lord commanded." Then the Lord will look down from heaven and bless the people and the land will flow with the milk and honey of the resurrection.

Today we wave the body and life of the resurrected Jesus before God as the firstfruits of Easter, and we do so in the hope and prayer that God the Holy Spirit will grow in us and through us the resurrection Harvest he hoped for when he sent Jesus as the Passover Seed. We pray for a personal filling of the Holy Spirit. We pray for new believers as first fruits of our ministry as HIC. And we pray that our tithes and offering may bring resurrection life to the foreigners, the orphans, the widows, and the unemployed in our family of faith in Jesus name.

Today on this firstfruits Easter Sunday I invite you to come to the table to celebrate the feast of the Lord's Supper. Jesus as the Passover Lamb was sacrificed and atoned for all our sins. God plant Jesus in the soil of the church. Today we wave the firstfruits of the Easter harvest - Jesus before the Lord. Today on this Firstfruits Easter we eat and drink in the hope that the Holy Spirit will fill us with love and boldness, that there will be evangelism growth in the coming year, that we will be generous with our tithes so that the poor, the foreigner, and the orphans and the unemployed will be blessed through our HIC ministry.