

## Easter: More like Game of Thrones than Peter Cottontail



It's Easter.

A time for chocolate eggs and hot cross buns and hat parades. The sentimentality of Easter can be comforting. Cute bunnies and chicks bursting from eggs conjure thoughts about new life and fresh hope.

And preachers can play into it. Easter becomes a time when they're often reminding us to invite Jesus into our hearts. Sermons are full of references to God's love and personal forgiveness and fresh starts.

But that's not exactly how the first Christians talked about the Easter event.

For the first Christians, the good news was less *Here Comes Peter Cottontail* and more like *Game of Thrones*. I'll give you some examples.

In Acts 13 we read the story of Paul preaching in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. To an audience of Jews and godfearing Gentiles, he recounts a potted history of Israel, including references to their slavery in Egypt, the forty years in the wilderness, the ministry of the prophet Samuel, the anointing of King Saul, and his successor, King David.

It's all about Israel rising from the dust and David ascending to the throne of a great new nation.

So far so good for his audience.

He then comes to Jesus: “From [David’s] descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised.” (v23)

What follows is a Readers Digest version of Jesus’ life, culminating with his crucifixion at the hands of Pontius Pilate. And then with all this as background information, he warms to his central point, to which he comes in verse 32: “We tell you the good news...”

That’s another way of saying, “This is the gospel! Get ready!” But he doesn’t tell them they have a God-shaped hole in their hearts that only Jesus can fill. It’s not sentimental or personal. It’s about empires and thrones and kings:

“What God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: ‘You are my son; today I have become your father.’ God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said, ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David’.” (Acts 13:32-34)

Paul reaches back to Psalm 2, a coronation psalm that was probably used as a liturgy of sorts during the enthronement of Israelite kings. And he says, in effect, everything that was promised to the Davidic kings of old, everything that is anticipated by the words of Psalm 2, is fulfilled in Jesus.



Psalm 2 is very *Game of Thrones*. It depicts armies amassing on the horizon, and kings and rulers conspiring against Israel. And it culminates with Yahweh appointing a super-king to reign over Zion, a king so awesome and great that every other ruler in the world would bend their knee before him. It ends by addressing those foreign kings: “Serve the

Lord with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling. Kiss his son, or he will be angry and your way will lead to your destruction.” (Ps 2:11-12)

Paul takes Israel’s great enthronement psalm and pretty much says, This is the gospel: Jesus is that king. He is the ruler we were promised. He is our refuge and our strength.

And Acts 13 isn’t the only time he preaches the gospel this way. In his letter to the Romans, he opens his correspondence with a brief summary of the good news. Bear in mind his reference in his sermon to Psalm 2, particularly the section about Yahweh declaring the king to be his son (Ps 2:7):

“...the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom 1:2-4)

*The gospel is this: Jesus is king. He ascends to the throne, he steps fully into his regal sonship, at his resurrection.*

*The resurrection isn’t just the exclamation point after the Good Friday message that Jesus died for your sins.*

*Resurrection equals enthronement.*

This doesn’t mean the gospel message isn’t concerned with personal forgiveness, but such forgiveness is viewed within the framework of Jesus’ reign.

In that sermon at the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, having described the reign and rule of King Jesus, Paul continues, “**Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.**” (Acts 13:38-39)

The challenge for us hearing this today is that we don’t know what it means to be ruled by a king. When Psalm 2 was written kings were essential. A strong king with a powerful army was your only guarantee you wouldn’t be crushed by other marauding nations (see, its just

like *Game of Thrones*). Israel was desperate for a king to keep them from being conquered.

But why do we need a king? We're not being ruled by anyone. Are we?



Well, maybe not by any individual. But we in the West are ruled by a global economy that fosters a deathly system of anxious scarcity. We are terrified of falling house prices or a teetering economy or a fall in the stock price. Our education system is calibrated to create workers that can contribute to that system. Our politics are oriented entirely around finding someone to run our economy better. We are told we must arm ourselves against tyrants when the true tyranny is the universal power of the NRA. The king of the world today is the military-industrial complex we were warned about 60 years ago.

These forces demand complete allegiance to their kingdom.

*Participation in the other kingdom — the reign of King Jesus — is an act of both resistance and alternative.*

By resistance I mean it is a visible manifestation that our lives are not defined by the production and consumption of commodity goods. By alternative I mean we demonstrate the way of our master — the way of generosity, hospitality, justice, peace and hope.

The task of the Easter preacher is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us. We are in danger of bending our knee and kissing the hand of this system of scarcity and fear. We need to hear again about our true king, the true son of God,

who set us free from the effects of sin and death and leads us into a whole new way of being human.

As Walter Brueggemann writes in his Easter poem about this new kingdom:

“On our own, we conclude:  
there is not enough to go around  
we are going to run short  
of money  
of love  
of grades  
of publications  
of sex  
of beer  
of members  
of years  
of life  
we should seize the day  
seize our goods  
seize our neighbour’s goods  
because there is not enough to go around  
and in the midst of our perceived deficit  
you come  
you come giving bread in the wilderness  
you come giving children at the 11th hour  
you come giving homes to exiles  
you come giving futures to the shut down  
you come giving Easter joy to the dead  
you come – fleshed in Jesus.  
and we watch while  
the blind receive their sight  
the lame walk  
the lepers are cleansed  
the deaf hear  
the dead are raised  
the poor dance and sing  
we watch  
and we take food we did not grow and  
life we did not invent and  
future that is gift and gift and gift and  
families and neighbours who sustain us  
when we did not deserve it.

It dawns on us – late rather than soon —  
that you “give food in due season  
you open your hand  
and satisfy the desire of every living thing.”

By your giving, break our cycles of imagined scarcity  
override our presumed deficits  
quiet our anxieties of lack  
transform our perceptual field to see  
the abundance.....mercy upon mercy  
blessing upon blessing.

Sink your generosity deep into our lives  
that your muchness may expose our false lack  
that endlessly receiving we may endlessly give  
so that the world may be made Easter new,  
without greedy lack, but only wonder,  
without coercive need but only love,  
without destructive greed but only praise  
without aggression and invasiveness....  
all things Easter new.....  
all around us, toward us and  
by us  
all things Easter new.  
Finish your creation, in wonder, love and praise. Amen.”

by Michael Frost |