

# Easter For Me (The Chief of Sinners)

Romans 7:21-8:39

*Romans (no. 19 in the series)*

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*Video and audio versions available online:*

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/easter-for-me-the-chief-of-sinners/>

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*This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!*

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## Message

Hello...I am the Chief of Sinners; I am the World-Champion Sinner; of all the great sinners, I am the foremost. Not Vladimir Putin, not Adolph Hitler, not Judas Iscariot, but me, and if you care to argue that fact, it's in the Bible. Look it up.<sup>i</sup>

I am the Chief of Sinners and the world's most religious man. Philippians 3:6 "As to righteousness under the law, blameless!" It's in the Bible. And now if you're thinking "Who are you to know so much about the Bible." Well, I wrote it, or at least a whole bunch of it; I wrote it and I'm in it. The book of Acts tells my story. In Acts 9 Ananias finds me in the "House of Judas." I'm kind of like the resurrected Judas... the 12<sup>th</sup> disciple.<sup>ii</sup> But public speaking is not my forte. In Acts 20 one of my sermons went too long and a kid named "Uterus" or "Eutychus," or something, fell asleep, fell out of a window, and died. But God raised him from the dead. So if this message kills you, don't worry about it.

I got some notes here, cause, like I said, I wasn't known for my speaking ability, but more for my letters. Most of your New Testament is literally reading my mail—thirteen letters. It's actually kind of embarrassing—I didn't know I was writing the Bible at the time! Thirteen letters, including the letter to the Romans, which your pastor is preaching on. And in my entirely unbiased opinion is doing a remarkable job. Many folks also think I wrote the Book of Hebrews. Let's just say I had some help, and I was a help. I taught the fellas all of that stuff, particularly about tents: inner tents, outer tents, lightweight backpacking tents etc. etc.

So, I am the Chief of Sinners, the World's most religious man, and I wrote the Bible—the all-time best-seller—that hardly anyone actually believes. Folks think they believe, but they don't believe, because they lack imagination. Faith is the ability to imagine what's actually true. But you modern people, have a hard time imagining anything more than what you can dissect, contain and comprehend—that is dead things. So, you don't really believe that there is a living God, and that he could be telling a story, and that you are part of that story.

And so, you modern people, know billions and billions of facts, but you don't know what any of them mean—you don't know the plot. You're like Mad Scientists and Pharisees. I was a Pharisee. I knew millions of facts about Scripture but didn't know the plot We Pharisees dissected the Word, so we could comprehend the Word, and use the Word to make our lives better and so, we crucified the plot.

Like I said: Chief of Sinners, World's most religious man, unwitting author of the Bible, and a slightly above average tentmaker. Many people don't realize this, because it gets translated out by people that don't know the plot, but the Bible is all about camping. That's why the Bible is so in tents . . . that's why it's so in tents (intense). Get it? (That's a little tentmaker humor! Forget about it!) But the Bible really is all about camping in tents and who gets to go in what tent and who's tent, and how all our tents could all turn into One Temple. Sometimes your Bible will read "booth," sometimes "tabernacle," but it's all basically tents—talking about tents. Sometimes your Bible will say "dwell," like "the word became flesh and dwelt among us."<sup>iii</sup> "Dwelt" is actually "tent." "Behold the dwelling place (literally 'tent') of God is with man. He will tent with them, and they will be his people."<sup>iv</sup>

So, what exactly is God's 'in-tent'? Get it? That's some bonus tentmaker humor. But seriously what is his intent? The Bible is all about tents, I was a tentmaker<sup>v</sup>, and so I borrowed your pastor's tent... and set it up for ya' during that lovely song You know, really, I like your pastor so much, we just connect. Sometimes when he talks it feels like I'm talking. And sometimes when I talk, you can almost imagine him talking. Well, he says to me, "Sure, Tiny"—that's what some people call me: "Tiny"—he says, "Sure Tiny, you can borrow my tent." He says, "This is a very special tent—it's a home away from home." And think about: isn't every tent, "a home away from home?" He says, "A lot of great memories in this two-man pup tent." "Me and my dad used to hike into to wilderness and camp in this tent." "After tending to our cuts and bruises and blisters, after fried fish on the fire, and after staring at the stars for hours, we'd crawl into this tent." He says, "Some kids have bad Dads, but I had a good one." "So, when I was a tiny boy, (and even a bigger boy), but especially when I was a tiny boy, my dad would pull me close and tell me stories, while outside the tent scary things—who knows what—lurked around in the woods." "I was a worrier," your pastor says to me "and I thought I had a lot to worry about. I wasn't good at baseball or basketball. The kids up the street used to pick on me and I felt like I was never enough. But my dad would pull me close and tell me about life on the farm when he was a tiny boy, and stories about harrowing adventures in World War II, and stories about travelling around the world. And then he would let me know that the favorite thing in all his stories—in all his world—was me. Then, I'd forget about me and find myself lost in him.

Outside the tent I felt like I was never enough, but inside the tent the thought just didn't occur to me... and so I would fall into a delicious sleep, [Sabot; rest]. Outside the tent I was constantly occupied with what had been and what might be, but inside the tent I was always happy in the now. Outside the tent, I was always trying to be "me," but felt like I couldn't be "me," and always wondered, "Who is me? Why is me? And what's wrong with me?" But inside the tent, in my father's arms, I just am who I am; I'm home." Your pastor started crying, big baby; he's a weenie.

So anyways I am Chief of Sinners, Most Religious, Author of the Bible, a tentmaker, and a Pharisee. I wasn't very good at basketball, or baseball, but I was great at Religion. And I should probably mention that in Latin, "Tiny" is pronounced "Paulos." My Hebrew name is Saul, that's Rabbi Saul; but my friends all call me Paul. I'm here to talk about "Easter for me." 1 Corinthians 15:5 (and I quote me) "Jesus appeared to Cephas, then the Twelve, then more than five hundred at one time, then James and all the apostles. And 'last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.'" You can read all about it in Acts 6-9, chapter 22, chapter 26, and Galatians 1.

Easter for me came a short time after Jesus was crucified. And while the news of the resurrection was spreading through the countryside like fire. I was on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus, with orders from the high priests to arrest Christ followers and deliver them up to prison and death. It was a form of religious genocide—like I said: "Chief of Sinners." You might rightfully ask, "Tiny, how did you get so evil?" Well, you know, I got so evil by wanting to make myself so good. I wanted to save my life, save my nation's life, and even God's life. I convinced myself, that I was the savior. Do you think that Adolph Hitler wanted to be evil? Do you? He told himself that he was saving Germany. Do you think that Vladimir Putin wants to be so evil? He tells himself that he's saving Russia and so any threat to Putin is also a threat to Russia, for he is the savior of Russia and not a tiny one, but big. Do you think that Caiaphas wanted to be evil? Or do you think he told himself that he was saving Israel?<sup>vi</sup> Do you think I wanted to be evil? I wanted to save Israel and make everyone good, and that's why I persecuted the unpatriotic followers of Jesus.

I grew up in the diaspora, in Tarsus, 600 miles north of Jerusalem. But as a young man I journeyed to Jerusalem and studied under the Great Rabbi Gamaliel.<sup>vii</sup> I was so zealous for my God, and my country, that I excelled beyond my peers and, in my mind, even beyond Gamaliel.<sup>viii</sup> And that would make some sense since we were "Pharisees"—it means "separate ones;" we liked being special; we each liked being the best. But Jesus seemed to have a thing for "the last and the least." He had a disregard for our religion—1500 years of tradition and commentary on the law of Moses. He even talked about the destruction of the temple—We had been building it for a thousand years! I was thrilled when they got rid of him. But then was filled with fury when it seemed that he just wouldn't go away.

I was there when we killed the first one—his name was Stephen. We drug him before the council: When he stood to speak, he told about the tent of witness in the wilderness, but then, defamed our temple in Jerusalem. It's true that his face glowed like an angel, but I told myself it was a trick. And we pummeled him to death with stones, and then I went on a rampage: old men, women, and children—I drug them all before the council and delivered them up to death. And it happened on more than one occasion—they would look at me—once, a child looked at me and said, "Abba, forgive him he doesn't know what he's doing." And to think, I knew Deuteronomy 5 that God is One and His law is Love. But by trying to make myself love, and make all of Israel love, I began to hate love and despise God. I was trying to run from God, impress God and be God—all at once. The harder I tried to be good, the more I felt the shackles of evil. I drug people off to prison, but they were free, and I was the prisoner. They were alive, and I was dead and dying. I was not the savior of Israel; I was the Israel that needed the saving.

So, like I was saying, I was on my way from Jerusalem to Damascus, breathing threats of great violence, when suddenly a brilliant light, brighter than the sun, shone all around me, knocking me to the dust—into Adam’s dust. And a voice said, “Saul, why are you persecuting me? It’s hard for you to kick against the goads.” I said, “Who are you?” And the voice said, “Jesus whom you are persecuting.” And then He said, “I’m calling you to be a witness.” (Like Stephen I would suppose, like the tent of witness in the wilderness.) And he said, “I’m delivering you” as if I had been in prison. And he said, “I am sending you to open the eyes of the goyim, the gentiles, the enemies.” And then I realized I was blind.

To make a long story short: Easter killed me; utterly annihilated me: “That’s me in the corner; that’s me in the spotlight, losing my religion.” Easter judged me, undid me, and utterly destroyed me—such that “It’s no longer I who live...”<sup>ix</sup> but somebody else who lives in me. In my own words in 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians: I suffered “the punishment of eternal destruction that comes from the presence of the Lord and the Glory of his might... I was brought to nothing by the manifestation of his appearing, the epiphany of his Parousia.”<sup>x</sup> But that was just the edge of Easter, for the eternal destruction is also the eternal construction—the death of death is the presence of Eternal Life—and that’s what the book of Romans is all about. And that’s why I borrowed your pastor’s tent.

Like I was saying, the Bible really is all about camping in tents, and who gets to go in what tent and who’s tent, and how all our tents could turn into One Ginormous Temple. If you’ve ever read through your Bible, you no doubt got bogged down along about Exodus 25. Up until then, it’s got a lot of drama, and some important instructions like the Ten Commandments—and yet, they only take up one page. But then in Exodus 25 God starts talking about tents, and keeps talking about tents: Leviticus, Numbers, some of Deuteronomy. It’s all about this crazy tent inside another tent inside a courtyard. . . and what you need to do to get into that innermost tent. It’s God’s tent and it’ll kill you, unless you’re the High Priest, and you’ve obeyed the law, and made the sacrifices—you enter by blood. Freaky, huh?

In the Book of Hebrews, we explain that the outer tent and the courtyard represent this present age<sup>xi</sup>—where priests and people can sometimes go. But the inner Sanctuary behind the veil, is like the presence of the Age to come, the 7<sup>th</sup> day, when “it is finished” and “everything is good.” But it can kill ya.’ Crazy huh? The inner tent is rest; It’s the Tent of I Am that I Am; it’s eternal. And that means that the inside is bigger than all of the outside—all of space and all of time. And yet even that tent is a picture of an even more perfect tent, not made by any human hands<sup>xii</sup>—eternal in the heavens—although, at that time, no one knew exactly what that meant or where “the heavens” was. Well 500 years after God gave all those instructions to Moses, and once Israel thought they were done camping, King David offered to build God a temple. And God seems to get perturbed at the idea because he wants to move about with his people... He doesn’t like the idea of getting stuck in a giant stone box. And yet he does tell David that “a Son of David” will build him a house.<sup>xiii</sup>

Well, I can see that you're glazing over a bit, just like Eutychus. Your pastor, he actually said to me, "all that tent and temple talk can get kind of boring." I looked at him and quoted myself from my first letter to the Corinthians, saying, "Don't you know that y'all are God's temple?" See that means that when God is describing the temple and the tabernacle and that inner Sanctuary, God is describing the very depths of you.<sup>xiv</sup> And where, do you suppose, is "that perfect tent," set up by God, "eternal in the heavens?" Jesus said to the Pharisees, "The kingdom of heaven is within you." Yikes! So, 1 Cor. 3, I said: "Don't you know that y'all are God's temple, if anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him"<sup>xv</sup> That's crazy That would be the "him" who is "God's temple;" "destroy him" and "rebuild him"—he is God's temple. Destroy and rebuild, that's what Jesus and Easter are all about.

So anyway, let's talk about Romans and "Easter for me." In Romans 7:9 I wrote, "I was once alive apart from the law." (The law is the knowledge of good and evil) "I was once alive..." So, folks naturally ask, "When was that? And are you now dead? When was that, Tiny?" Well, that was when I was at peace with God in the Garden of Eden. And folks say, "You're not Adam." But, of course, I am Adam. It's just like your pastor has been telling you: Adam means "Man" or "Mankind." And then folks say, "Well, where's the garden of Eden?" Well, as your pastor explained: The garden of Eden is in the innermost tent, past the sword of the high priest, behind the curtain, and between the two cherubim on top of the ark of the covenant. The Garden of Eden is in the inner tent in the depths of the temple that is you.

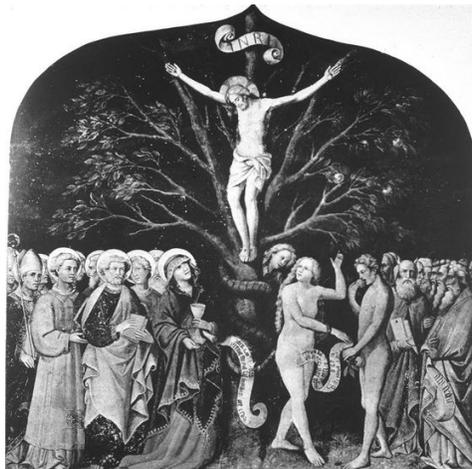
When I was a tiny Adam, I had no knowledge of Good and evil but just like every tiny Adam, there came a moment when I took knowledge of good and evil and began to judge myself, hoping to make myself into the image of my Father, my Creator, who is the good. But just by doing that, I began to believe that I was my own creator. I began to grow what you might call an "ego," and what I would call "an old Adam," a false self, a body of sin and death—a psychic body, that's like my physical body, which only feels its own pleasure and its own pain. I call that the flesh, and it's built with sin—the desire to save yourself.

Like your pastor has been teaching you (it's remarkable how much he agrees with me; it's almost as if we were the same person). Like your pastor has been teaching you, you each have a true self, who is God's judgment—it is the "Me" that GOD: I Am the I Am, has created. It is the self who trusts that "God is salvation." And you also have a false self, who is your own judgment—it is the "Me" that you think you have created; it is the self that thinks you are your own salvation. In Genesis 2 Adam took the knowledge of Good and evil, and tried to make himself in the image of God and was exiled from the garden. In the same way, every tiny Adam takes knowledge of Good and evil, and tries to create his own life, and is exiled from himself—the innermost tent.

So, this is the situation of every Adam that has become "self-conscious." You have a "life"—so to speak—you have a psyche, a world that you have built.

- It's constructed with your decisions, your judgments.
- It's what I call "the flesh."
- It's just like this beautiful old stone building, built in 1920 with human hands.
- It's just like the outer courts of the Tabernacle that became the stone temple.

It's very nice but you worry about this thing you call "your life" because it's threatened by other "lives" and it's falling apart. In other words, the older you get, the more you know that something is wrong with the "me" that you have created; It's lonely as hell and it's dying. And the truth is, it's been dead ever since you left the garden—the garden in the tent, in the temple, that is YOU. So, this is your situation: you are alone, in a world that is crumbling; you're alone in an age that is coming to an end—you're dying, and asking, "What does it all mean?" You're a crumbling old stone temple, but in the depths of this old stone temple that you think is you, there is a tent. And what's in the tent? The same thing that was in the innermost tent, in the tabernacle that God told Moses to build in the wilderness. In the tent, is the Ark of the Covenant. And what is the Ark?



*"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena*

Now, pay attention! And remember your Bible. The Ark is literally a coffin made of "tree" (*ates* in Hebrew). And in the coffin is "the knowledge of Good and evil" written in stone. That's dead knowledge, as if, someone had taken its life (the life of wisdom) on a tree. But on top of the Ark, (that is a tree), there is the blood of sacrifice and "the life is in the blood"—it's called "the Mercy seat." My friend John had a vision, and on the Mercy Seat, (which is the throne of God), he saw a lamb standing, and as if it had just been slain.<sup>xvi</sup>

Do you understand? The plot to the whole story, the meaning of all things, is in the innermost tent, in the depths of the temple that is you. But the plot, is guarded by the cherubim on top of the Ark, just like the cherubim that guard the way to The Tree of Life. Eternal life is guarded by the cherubim, the knife of the high priest, and a curtain, separating the innermost tent from where you are—in the outermost temple. So, we each exist in a house that's crumbling, like an old stone temple. And we're haunted—a haunted house—haunted with a voice from behind a curtain, in the depths of our soul. You know when Jesus appeared to me on the road to Damascus shining brighter than the sun, he said "Saul, it's hard for you to kick against the goads." (And, if you didn't know, goads are used to herd goats, not sheep.) "Saul, it's hard for you..."

See, I was being goaded by the Voice of Love through every person I had persecuted, particularly when they said, "Father forgive." And I was being goaded by the same Voice that came from behind the curtain in the temple of my soul—what you often call a "conscience." I

was condemned from the outside in and the inside out. I knew that I was dead and dying; a prisoner in the prison that was “me.”

- The harder I tried to be Good all the more evil I actually became.
- The harder I tried to be free, the deeper I sank into the bondage.
- The harder I tried to live, the more I grew terrified to die, and yet, was already dead.

Romans 7:24 “Oh wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Do you understand? This body of death is like this old stone temple. It’s my religion. It’s my confidence in the flesh; Philippians 3:5 “...circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.” So, what exactly is “the body of death?” It’s the work of my ego; it’s the “life” I have built; it’s all of my choices made in an effort to save myself, redeem myself and justify myself—It’s what your pastor calls “Me-sus.” This [pointing to the building] is “Me-sus.” This is my choice. And what is God’s choice? Well, it’s this tent and in this tent on the other side of the curtain. God’s choice is Jesus—the name means “God is Salvation.”

So, can you see, that in the unmitigated presence of Jesus (God is salvation), Me-sus (the belief that I am salvation) will be utterly destroyed

- like a bad dream upon waking,
- like a shadow destroyed by the light,
- like a lie destroyed by the truth,
- like pride destroyed by the consuming fire that is the Love of God.

Big old important Rabbi Saul died on the road to Damascus. And Tiny “Paul” was born; He was set free, to be me—the real “me.” It happened in a moment, and yet it took a lifetime to die to myself and rise from the prison that I once thought was me. After I was blinded by Jesus (who is the Light), Jesus had Ananias pray for my sight; He told Ananias, “Don’t worry Ananias, I will show him—he will see—what he must suffer for my name.”<sup>xvii</sup>

My religion was Me-sus, and it dies in the presence of Jesus, that’s his name. And so, “that’s me in the corner, that’s me in the spotlight, losing my religion.” Philippians 3:8 (and I quote me) “I have suffered the loss of all things (‘Hebrew born of Hebrews, as to righteousness under the law, blameless). I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as shit for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” But you see, I couldn’t make that happen—that would just be more Me-sus. I had to watch that happen—and that is the resurrection of Jesus from the tomb that was Me-sus. That’s Easter to me; that’s Easter in me; that’s Easter through me.

So, I wrote “Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death...” and then I wrote, “Thanks be to God through Christ Jesus... there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” You do know that it was me-sus, and all my brothers, that took the Life of Jesus on the tree in the garden, on the very mountain where Solomon built the temple, and where ancient Adam took the fruit. If that is not the “Chief of sins,” I don’t know what is. And yet, it’s a sin that every son of Adam has committed. When you come back to the tree, you

cannot help but see what it is that all of our self-righteousness has accomplished—the crucifixion of the righteousness of God... it's the knowledge of evil. That's what we have accomplished: the knowledge of evil.

At the tree we took knowledge of God and crucified the life of God, forever condemning the arrogant illusion that I thought was “me.” But there is therefore now no condemnation, for those that are in Christ Jesus, for they see that they have already been condemned; they see that all their self-righteousness is “*scubala* (Philippians 3:8),” just shit. In Jesus—God condemned sin in the flesh. Then, at the end of this age, and the edge of the next, Jesus cried “Father, forgive them... it is finished” and delivered up his Spirit. Matthew 27:51 “At that moment (behold<sup>xviii</sup>) the curtain of the temple”—the curtain between the outer temple and the innermost tent—“was torn in two from top to bottom.”<sup>xix</sup> Hebrews 10:20 That curtain... is... His Flesh. You see: Jesus is the Spirit of God our Father, having left the throne of God in order to find us, and bring each of us home, to the Father's tent. And yet he was with us all along in the inner sanctuary, of our wayward souls... just as he journeyed with ancient Israel in the tabernacle in the wilderness. Jesus is the Way; Jesus is the Bus that takes us on a ride—a ride through death and home to Life; through hell and home to heaven; through the valley of the shadow and home to our Father's Tent.

What does it mean? It means all of Romans chapter 8. It means you can “walk according to the flesh;” you can go about that thing that you call “your life,” out here in the outer courts of the temple. You can set your mind on yourself,

- constantly judging yourself, judging your neighbor, and always terrified of the judgment of God.
- constantly wondering, “am I good enough or am I too evil?”
- constantly trying to love, but unable to love, because love is losing yourself and finding yourself in another.
- constantly trying to save yourself, but unable to save yourself, for its yourself from which you must be saved.
- constantly too terrified to die, yet wanting to die, but unable to die, for you can't kill yourself with yourself—someone has to do it for you.
- constantly haunted by your past and terrified of your future and so unable to live right now.

You can exist in the outer courts of the temple, in this Age of space and time. Or you can live in the inner tent that, is “in Christ”—the Life of the age to come. You can “enter his rest.”<sup>xx</sup> You can go into the innermost sanctuary. [Rabbi Saul climbs back into the tent.] That's why I wrote, Romans 7:22, “I delight (together with someone) ... in the law—like a living law—in my innermost man,” my innermost tent.

So right now, you can say, “Dad, I'm scared that I'm not enough for you.”

- Right now, you can hear the Truth, “You are in me, and I am in you. I am your blood and that, my son, my daughter, is more than enough.”
- Right now, you can hear His story and Your story, “I am making you in my own image and I won't fail, for it is finished and soon you will see everything good.

- Right now, you can lose your psyche and find it in his, as you listen to the story: “I made the stars. I made the fish, and I am the fire. And my favorite thing that I ever made is you.”
- Right now, you can hear the Blessing of God from within the body of Jesus, “You are my beloved son, my beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased.”
- Right now, you can enter his tent and say Abba, I’m home.

Romans 8:15 “When we cry Abba Father, it is the Spirit himself, bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.” When I say “Abba Daddy,” that Big Old Important Rabbi Saul dies, and Paul—Tiny Paul—rises from the dead—and God in Tiny Paul more than conquers the world, the entire world, all of space and all of time.” “Anyone in Christ is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”<sup>xxi</sup> See, it’s like I said, the inside of the tent is bigger than all of space and time. And, in this world of space and time, the tent grows until all of space and time is in the tent and everything old, has become forever new. [Rabbi Saul climbs out of the tent].

In Israel we had three feasts in which everyone was commanded to participate.<sup>xxii</sup>

- The first was Passover—Jesus died on Passover, and he is the “first fruits of the new creation,” “first born from the dead.”<sup>xxiii</sup>
- The second was Pentecost—On Pentecost, His Spirit filled the church, that’s His Body in this world, who is also first fruits. Which means there’s more fruits.<sup>xxiv</sup>
- The third feast was the Feast of Tabernacles—You didn’t think that you were the only fruits, did you?

Pentecost came at the harvest of the wheat—that’s bread. Tabernacles came at the harvest of the grapes—that’s wine. It was also called “the Feast of Ingathering” for everything left to harvest was harvested at Tabernacles. At Tabernacles, all of Israel would go outside of their stone houses in Old Jerusalem. And they would live in tents as on the Journey to the Promised Land. And at the end of seven days, (like the days of creation), they would pack up their tents and go back into the city. And on the 8<sup>th</sup> day (which was to be like an endless 7<sup>th</sup> day) they would feast in a New Jerusalem.<sup>xxv</sup> And that was just a picture of The New Jerusalem that is coming down right now—the moment you enter the innermost tent. We love because he first loved us and nothing is more powerful than love. God is Love and God is telling the Story. And Love is his ‘in-tent’.

There is a legend that God once sought the advice of a Wiseman. “I want to play a game of hide-n-seek with humanity,” said God. To play hide-n-seek, is to create a desire for that which is sought. Isaiah wrote “Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior.”<sup>xxvi</sup> Well God said to the Wiseman, “I want to play hide-and-seek with humanity. I’ve asked my angels, ‘Where’s the best place to hide?’ Some say the depths of the ocean. Other say “the highest mountain’ or ‘the far side of the moon.’ What do you suggest?” Wisdom thought and then said, “Hide in the human heart. It is the last place they will think to look.”<sup>xxvii</sup>

It’s just a legend, but I think God likes to play hide-n-seek, but a particular version of hide and seek—a version that I would play with my family when I was a tiny boy. I think you call it “Sardines.” In Sardines, someone hides, and everyone looks for him. And when you find him, you join him. And pretty soon everybody is packed in a tiny tent like sardines in a can. And

somebody giggles, and somebody laughs, and then everybody gets found. Someone once wrote, “God will be found the way everybody gets found in sardines—by the sound of the laughter of everyone heaped together in the end.”<sup>xxviii</sup> Jesus is the End. And that’s the plot—all things filled with Love—That’s God’s intent.

The children cry “olly olly oxen free” at the end of hide-n-seek. Your English scholars think that comes from “all ye all ye outs come in free.” And, you see, that’s a perfect description of the Fathers in-tent: Grace. That’s what God has accomplished: the knowledge of the Good—that’s Grace (your God is Grace.) And that’s how you will live when you live your life from that tent, “free.”

And now I should mention why I’m dressed as a prisoner. It isn’t because I used to drag people off to prison (which I did). And it isn’t simply because when I appeared to be free, I was actually in prison (which I was). It’s because I spent so much of my adult life in prison, and yet I had never actually been so free, never so free, as when Jesus set me free of “me.” Once, my friend Silas, and me were chained in stocks, in Philippi, our first trip to Europe (Acts 17:24)—“chained in stocks” in the “innermost prison” But we went into the innermost tent, and there, together, in the dark, we started singing, and then laughing, and the other prisoners were listening. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, the doors were opened, and everyone’s chains fell off, and Silas and I, we evangelized Europe. And it wasn’t “toil,” or “work”—that’s what it is to walk in the flesh. It wasn’t work; it was worship; it was Easter.

## Communion

And so, Jesus took bread and broke it saying this is my body given to you. And, in the same way, he took the cup saying this is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of this all of you and do it in remembrance of me.

Do you see that all of this [points to the communion table] is in the Holy of Holies—the innermost tent? Christ is inviting you to hide in him and hear the voice of our Father.

So, close your eyes and in the depths of your being, say “Abba, I’m home.” And in that place, listen to his voice, “I am so happy. For you are and will always be my Beloved. Neither death, nor life, nor rulers, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation is able to separate you, from me and my Love for you in Christ Jesus.” When you leave this place, this place leaves with you and in you. That’s Easter.

## Benediction

These are scary times, but Covid and the threat of nuclear war just remind us of what we usually deny: we’re all dead and dying. Hebrews 2:14-15: The devil keeps us in lifelong bondage through the fear of death. But you won’t fear death once you’ve come to believe that Eternal Life has pitched his tent in the sanctuary of your soul.

Easter means that the door to that tent is always open. So, happy Easter.

You can't fear death if you're already dead and eternal life lives in your soul. Suddenly you become very dangerous to the principalities of this world because you know that your redeemer lives. He lives in you, he lives through you; he's pitched his tent in you, with his people, his body. And he will not fail. And soon you will see it, everything good, in Jesus' name. And then we will say thank you and worship and worship and worship. So, in Jesus' name, this is really all that I'm saying but it's dreadfully important: believe the Gospel, Amen.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> 1 Timothy 1:15

<sup>ii</sup> Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics II.2, The Doctrine of God* (T&T Clark, London, paperback, 2004) pp 477-506. This is a most fascinating discussion of the way in which Paul fulfills the office of Judas, and hands Jesus over (*paradosis*) as Judas, and as each believer who trusts Christ for salvation.

<sup>iii</sup> John 1:14

<sup>iv</sup> Revelation 21:3

<sup>v</sup> Acts 18:1-4

<sup>vi</sup> John 11:47-53, John 18:12-14 (absolutely fascinating verses)

<sup>vii</sup> Acts 5:34, 22:3

<sup>viii</sup> Galatians 1:14

<sup>ix</sup> Galatians 2:20

<sup>x</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 1:9, 2:8

<sup>xi</sup> Hebrews 9:9

<sup>xii</sup> Hebrews 8:2, 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:5

<sup>xiii</sup> 1 Chronicles 17:1-15

<sup>xiv</sup> The day of universal revelation, Barth suggests, as itself the day of judgment, will disclose that Jesus Christ himself has always somehow accompanied every member of the human race. If not directly through revelation by grace to, then he will have done so at least indirectly in some unknown and incognito form. That form will at least be divested of its hiddenness and revealed to each one for what it was and is and is to be, in its gracious significance and inevitable judgment, before the consuming fire of God. . . . We know, states Barth, "only one certain triumph of hell"-the cross of Golgotha on which Jesus died for our sins-and "this triumph of hell took place in order that it would never again be able to triumph over anyone. . . . We know of only One who was abandoned in this way, and only of One who was lost. This One was Jesus Christ. And he was lost (and found again) in order that none should be lost apart from him" (II/2, p. 498). When we know this One by faith and see what he endured of the sake of the world, then no matter how desperate the situation may be, we will not abandon hope for anyone, not even for ourselves.

-George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace*, p. 248

And I was still awake, and then our Lord opened my spiritual eyes and showed me my soul in the middle of my heart. I saw my soul as large as if it were a kingdom; and from the properties that I saw in it, it seemed to me to be a glorious city. In the centre of that city sits our Lord Jesu [this is the spelling in the book], true God and true man, glorious, highest Lord; and I saw him dressed imposingly in glory. He sits in the soul, in the very centre, in peace and rest, and he rules and protects heaven and earth and all that is. The Manhood and the Godhead sit at rest, and the Godhead rules and protects without any subordinate or any trouble; and my soul was blissfully filled with the Godhead, which is supreme power, supreme wisdom, supreme goodness. In all eternity Jesus will never leave the position which he takes in our soul; for in us is his most familiar home and his favourite dwelling. This was a ravishing and restful sight, for it is truly so everlastingly. And it is very pleasing to God and extremely helpful to us that we should see this while we are here.

- Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 33

<sup>xv</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

<sup>xvi</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new [*prosphatos*: "newly slain, fresh"] and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,<sup>xvi</sup>

- Hebrews 10:19-20

<sup>xvii</sup> Acts 9:16

<sup>xviii</sup> ESV

<sup>xix</sup> NRSV

<sup>xx</sup> Hebrews 4:11

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<sup>xxi</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV

<sup>xxii</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 8:12-13, Deuteronomy 16:13-17, Leviticus 23:33-44

<sup>xxiii</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:20-23, Colossians 1:15-18

<sup>xxiv</sup> James 1:18, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, Revelation 14:4

<sup>xxv</sup> Zechariah 16:16-21, Numbers 8:13-17, Exodus 34:21-23, Numbers 29:12-24

<sup>xxvi</sup> Isaiah 45:15 NRSV

<sup>xxvii</sup> The master became a legend in his lifetime. It was said that God once sought his advice: "I want to play a game of hide-and-seek with humankind. I've asked my angels what the best place is to hide in. Some say the depth of the ocean. Others the top of the highest mountain. Others still the far side of the moon or a distant star. What do you suggest?"

Said the master, "Hide in the human heart. That's the last place they will think of!"

-Writings selected by William Dych, S.J., *Anthony DeMello* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), p. 82

<sup>xxviii</sup> A man I know found out last year he had terminal cancer. He was a doctor. And knew about dying, and he didn't want to make his family and friends suffer through that with him. So he kept his secret. And died. Everybody said how brave he was to bear his suffering in silence and not tell everybody, and so on and so forth. But privately his family and friends said how angry they were that he didn't need them, didn't trust their strength. And it hurt that he didn't say good-bye.

He hid too well. Getting found would have kept him in the game. Hide-and-seek, grown-up style. Wanting to hide. Needing to be sought. Confused about being found. "I don't want anyone to know." "What will people think?" "I don't want to bother anyone."

Better than hide-and-seek, I like the game called Sardines. In Sardines the person who is It goes and hides, and everybody goes looking for him. When you find him, you get in with him and hide there with him. Pretty soon everybody is hiding together, all stacked in a small space like puppies in a pile. And pretty soon somebody giggles and somebody laughs and everybody gets found.

Medieval theologians even described God in hide-and-seek terms, calling him *Deus Absconditus*. But me, I think old God is a Sardine player. And will be found the same way everybody gets found in Sardines-by the sound of laughter of those heaped together at the end.

"Olly-olly-oxen-free." The kids out in the street are hollering the cry that says, "Come on in, wherever you are. It's a new game." And so say I. To all those who have hid too good. *Get found, kid!* Olly-olly-oxen-free.

- Robert Fulghum, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* (New York, NY: Ivy Books, 1986), pp. 55-56

Just a few weeks ago, I had an experience that reminded me of Allie and Laura and underscored how we can banish fear with love. I was invited to dinner by dear friends who have four young children under the age of ten. While their mother was making dinner, I offered to play with the kids. They wanted to play Sardines. I didn't know what Sardines, so they instructed me in this version of hide-and-seek. In this game, one person hides, and everyone looks for that one person. As each person finds the hidden player, the "finder" hides with the "hider." By the end of the game, everyone is hiding-waiting for the last person to find them.

The ten-year-old offered to hide first. By the time I found him, two of his siblings were already in the hiding place. We squeezed into the dark cabinet in the basement and waited for the last seeker. We poked each other and giggled and tried to be quiet. The last person to look for us was the youngest-three years old. One of the siblings whispered to me as we heard the little sister come down the basement stairs, "She's afraid of the basement. She's afraid of the dark. She's afraid of everything!"

We waited as we heard her little voice, "Are you down here?" She walked tentatively toward the hiding place, talking to herself. "I don't like it down here. I'm scared, but I'm a big girl."

We waited together, each of us trying to hold our breath and not move. Finally, she clumsily opened the cupboard, and we burst out upon her. She gleefully exclaimed, "Everything I'm looking for is here!"

- Sharon A. Hersh, *"Mom, Sex is NO big deal!"*, p. 111-112

<sup>16</sup> So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. <sup>5</sup> For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. <sup>2</sup> For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, <sup>3</sup> if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. <sup>4</sup> For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. <sup>5</sup> He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

-2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5