



# OPENING DAY



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The Seattle Mariners had their opening day on April 1<sup>st</sup> this year. Now, it could be easy to insert a joke here about the season starting on April Fools, but to me it was awesome news. I admittedly did not get to watch the game, but the great news I read was this: “The Seattle Mariners have received approval from the State of Washington and King County to host up to 9,000 fans per game at T-Mobile Park beginning with Opening Night on Thursday, April 1st.” To go from where we were last this time last year, not having any baseball at all, to being able to have 9,000 people watch a game in-person is a huge step!

I do hope they have a great season. And I also pray that we continue to go in the right direction, with things opening up safely, as COVID cases go down. As I was thinking about the Mariners Opening Day, it made me think about another day. It made me think about that morning the women went to put spices on Jesus’ body, but they weren’t able to. Why? It was opening day!

The tomb, the grave, was opened! It held Jesus no longer! He was and is risen! Because of his Opening Day it means that we too will have the same Opening Day where our tombs, our graves, will be opened! We too will rise to be with our Lord and Risen Savior Jesus. There is no fooling about that!

I share the opening day of Easter, in light of the opening day of the 2021 baseball season, because it can be easy to feel like 9,000 people in the stands isn’t enough. We might look around and see other regions more fully open and get upset. We might also get worried about if things will get closed down again in the future. I do not know the answers to these things, but I do know this one thing: because of the Opening Day of Easter, no matter what happens, we can rest secure in the peace of our Risen Lord. While the Mariners will win some and lose some, and while things in this world are uncertain, we can be certain we have eternal victory in Jesus Christ. So as we live the Resurrection, let us go out and share the grand slam of the hope, grace, love and enthusiasm of Opening Day, of Easter!

In Our Risen Lord’s Name,  
Pastor Matt

## HE WILL EASTER YOU by Chad Bird



Easter is the day when Jesus says to the world, "Behold, I am making all things new." He makes you new in Himself. He gives you a new identity. You are no longer the children of this world, but the children of a heavenly Father.

He will enfold you in His arms and never let you go. Through every pain, every loss in this fallen world, He is by your side. Nothing and no one will separate you from His love.

He will love you through sickness. He will love you through loneliness. He will love you through the deepest, darkest valleys of this life. And He will love you even into the grave.

From that grave, He will show you, once more, His love on the last day of this sad, dying world. He will reappear at the climax of history, when the earth and the heavens will vanish in smoke. He will reach down and pull your waiting body from the grip of this earth. He will transform you from dust and ashes back into flesh. He will put His mouth to your nostrils and breathe life back into your bones. He will give warmth back to your blood. He will stand you on your feet, in a body pain-free, sickness-free, death-free. He will give you your body back, glorious and resplendent, like His own.

Jesus will Easter you.

On that day we all will laugh like little children. Our voices will blend with those of angels. We will worship the Lamb in His kingdom that has no end. On that day we will behold our God face to face. We will gaze with wonder and delight upon the face of Jesus. In His face we shall see nothing but grace, mercy, life, and light.

He will wipe every tear from our eyes. There shall no longer be any death, or mourning, or crying, or pain. There shall be only Jesus, with us, for us.

For He is risen. He is risen, indeed. And in Him we too shall rise.

## LCMS STEWARDSHIP MINISTRY APRIL 2021 ARTICLE



Our Father in heaven sent His Son, Jesus, to be our Savior. His atoning sacrifice is the first fruits of all the dead, a pleasing aroma to His Father, so that His perfect life and death count for all who believe in Him. He claimed us as His own children in Holy Baptism. He sustains and strengthens our faith with His Holy Word and His Body and Blood.

As new creatures, who have put on Christ, we bear good fruit. We do the good works prepared for us, which He makes known to us in His Word. By faith then, trusting in the Word of God, we do what he says because He does not lie and always keeps His promises. For “without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb. 11:6).

And so the Lord promises: “Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine” (Prov. 3:9-10). How do we honor the Lord with the wealth that God has given us in His generosity? By giving generously to those whom the Lord has called us to love and support your family, your society, and your church. And His promise is that, in so doing, you will never lack.

A common counterpoint is: “But that’s from the Old Testament!” Our Lord Jesus Himself gives us similar promises in the New Testament. He says, at the conclusion of the parable of the talents: “For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance” (Matt. 25:29).

And then at the end of the parable of the dishonest manager, he says: “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Luke 16:10-13).

And in His sermon on the mount, he says: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:19-21).

We have become conditioned against these promises because of their misuse by the peddlers of the prosperity gospel – the guys on TV who say you get rich by putting God in your debt. And thus, we miss out on the fact that God does reward temporal faithfulness in temporal matters with temporal blessings. It’s no quid pro quo. It’s all from God’s grace and His fatherly divine goodness and mercy. But those Bible passages do in fact say what they say! It’s not the Old Testament’s problem. It’s ours. It is almost as if we have become so jaded against this that we think it a virtue to be stingy with our offerings.

But our Father in heaven still loves to bless those who bless others. He loves to give to those who give freely and generously. In fact, he challenges us to challenge Him: “Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need” (Mal. 3:10).

And so, while we don’t give so that we would get, we do receive from the Lord in order to give, and He will bless your giving with more receiving. As St. Paul wrote in Rom. 8:32: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

## CHRIST'S WORDS OF COMFORT: JOHN 3:16 by Pastor Ron Hodel @ <https://www.1517.org/articles/christs-words-of-comfort-john-316>

How do you know if you are truly loved? Loved not because of what you bring to the table, but simply loved for who you are. If you have 'good' parents, somehow you know. If you have a 'good' spouse, somehow you know. How you know is kind of hard to put into words, actually. It's like, if you see it, if you experience it, you'll know it. But then there's the question of why.

Why are you loved? Perhaps you might consider your attributes - you're a nice person, you're thoughtful, you're kind, you try looking out after your spouse's every need - things like that - always putting the best construction on who you are and why you deserve someone's love.

But then what about when you're not these things. What about when you're grumpy, thoughtless and less than compassionate. What is it that makes you lovable when you're having a bad day and you're lashing out is apparent to everyone around?

Allow me to use marriage as an illustration. Often, when it comes to marriage, people will say it's a 50-50 proposition with each spouse bringing an equal portion to the table. That sounds good. That sounds really fair, and fair indeed it is. Except that in a relationship like this, you've always got to keep score. You've got to make sure that you're not being shorted, that the other person is putting out just as much as you are - just to be fair, of course. To counter that, people will say, no, marriage must be 100-100. But even with that noble goal, one's still in the scorekeeping mode. In that kind of marriage, the wife needs to be the Proverbs 31 woman (look it up, verses 10-31 if you dare). Faultless in every regard. And the husband needs to be a full upgrade on Prince Charming all the time. No bad days.

I'll submit to you that a good marriage can't be a 50-50, nor even a 100-100 proposition. For a good marriage to work it must be premised on a 100-0 equation. I know that sounds unfair and it is. (Not that one strives to be at the '0' end of the equation but through no fault of your own - or very often by your own most grievous fault - that's where you do find yourself at times. Worth and worthy of absolutely nothing, and yet, you are loved.) That's a very comforting place to be in. All because, for some reason, you are loved.

So the question arises, why does God our heavenly Father love us so much? You sin! He still loves you. You ignore him. He loves you. You wander away. He loves you. You forget about him for years. He still loves you. You offend him. He loves you. Why? I don't think even the greatest Pastor or the most brilliant seminary professor can give an adequate answer to that question. But love us he does. Loves you no matter what. Loves you no matter how many times you have screwed up. Loves you to death, he does.

God's love is not based on a 50-50 transaction - if you are good for God, God will be good for you. It's not even based on a 100-100 arrangement - where if you give it all over to God, God will return the favor. None of that works for not only our selfish thoughts, harsh words and dreadful deeds are included in the mix of what we bring to the table, but who we are by nature: broken, selfish and curved in upon ourselves. We bring nothing to the table when it comes to God, nothing but our sin anyway. But nevertheless, you are loved. Completely! Why, I'm not sure. It's certainly not because of something innate in us. It's not because God looked off into the future and saw what we'd become. It has to do with the heart of God. But how much you are loved, that God does tell us:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16-17).

God loved the world in this way: he gave his Son for you.

What an incredible comfort those words are. That Christ Jesus absorbed all that was and is wretched about you into himself and, to pay the price you deserved to pay, gave up his life so that you wouldn't have to. He wasn't forced by his Father to do so as if it was some sort of divine child abuse. He was fully complicit in the act himself. Sent by the Father, Jesus, by his own choice, gave up his life for you. "I lay down my life that I may take it up again" (John 10:17).

Jesus came, not to condemn you, not to wag his divine finger under your nose, not to judge you by pointing out every place you haven't met the 50-50 or 100-100 computations. No, *for you and for your salvation he came down from heaven* above to earth to save you. You sin. You ignore him. You wander away. You forget about him for years. You offend him. He loves you. You bring '0' to the table and still, he brings 100% all for you.

In a sense, that's kind of uncomfortable. We don't like that there's nothing you can bring to the table that makes him love you, nothing you bring to the table that can pay him back for his graciousness. By nature, it's built into us to be scorekeepers and even when the odds come out in our favor, if the score is uneven, it bothers us. And yet, when you've so utterly failed in life that your situation is hopeless, your Lord Jesus wraps his lovingly cross-outstretched arms around you, assuring you that, nevertheless, you are loved.

Oh, it is true, as Scripture declares and the Christian creeds confess, Jesus will at the end, reappear to judge the quick and the dead. But this you need not fear. It's rather comforting in fact, because, broken as you are, you will be judged righteous. In fact, you already have been declared thus. Holy and blameless, not because of what you've brought to the table but because the rightness of Jesus has been imputed to you, credited to your account. And when you find your life completely in arrears, that's a very comforting thing to know. In fact, it will completely change you.

