

Seventh Sunday of Easter

John 17:20-26

These verses comprise part of Jesus' prayer in behalf of the disciples, and for you and for me. What a wonderful blessing to contemplate, and what a challenge.

Jesus painted a picture of who we are in Him and why. He prayed that we may be in unity with one another and with God. (vs.21&23) He prayed that we may be with Him so that we can see His glory in His kingdom.(vs.24) He said that He will continue to reveal the Father to us through Himself.(vs.26) Knowing how urgently Jesus prayed for us should give us just a taste of our great value to Him and His great love for us.

But there is more in Jesus' prayer than unity and love. There is an urgent mission that is to be accomplished through that unity and love. At the end of verse 21 is the phrase, "...so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (NIV) Verse 23 says, "...to let the world know that you sent me...." These words are for you and for me. Jesus prayed them after He included us in His prayer to His Father. Such a blessing, and such a mission!

We can no longer claim that the job of letting the world know about Jesus' love is just for pastors. Pastors are our leaders, our teachers, our trainers, and our co-workers in getting the gospel out, but they aren't the only ones called to tell the world about the Savior. It's also a mission to which Jesus calls us.

In His prayer, Jesus described the very best kind of evangelism; the evangelism of unity and love. Last week, we talked about Jesus' command that we love one another. Is there a better way to draw people into God's kingdom? Churches whose members show the love of Christ to one another and display the love of Christ to their communities are more likely to grow! Christians, you and I, who allow Christ's love to dwell deeply in our hearts can be a mighty witness to the world around us.



Seventh Sunday of Easter

John 17:20-26

1. John 17 is Jesus' longest recorded prayer. Who does He pray for in vs. 1-5? In vs. 6-18? In vs. 20-25?

2. Summarize Jesus' petition in vs. 21?

3. Summarize Jesus' petition in vs. 24?



4. Several times Jesus prays for the world (vs. 21, 23)? What is His desire for the world?

5. Jesus prays for unity. Is that unity present in your family? In your church? How can we become more unified?

6. The Easter season of the church year is concluding. Have you witnessed again the risen Christ? Has the joy of His resurrection filled your heart and home? Have you shared this Good News with anyone?

Are you in a Bible study group?

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 1:1-14

We have all used the phrase “20-20 hindsight” and it is surely applicable when looking at the apostles at the Ascension. They had spent three years with Jesus, yet asked Him, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” An angel approached them saying, “...why do you stand looking into the sky?” They still did not comprehend Jesus’ kingdom. How could they have been with the Master, and not better understand His mission?

These men went on to be the primary evangelists of their time. They were the tools by which the Holy Spirit began the Church and built the faith. Almost without exception, they were executed for preaching salvation in Christ Jesus. Their God-inspired writings give us strength, guidance, and encouragement every day. What drove them to spread the love of Christ even though it would result in great hardship and even death? What did they know that we sometimes forget? We understand salvation by grace through faith, just as they did. Is there more to our walk with Christ than salvation for eternity?

In the tenth chapter of John, Jesus described the relationship between the Shepherd and His sheep. Here are some of the descriptive phrases He used: “...he calls his own sheep by name...the sheep follow him because they know his voice. And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him because they do not know the voice of strangers...I know My own and My own know Me.” Jesus also said, “I have come that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.”



As we read of the apostles’ misunderstanding at the Ascension and identify with their ignorance, we take comfort in that we can go back to Spirit-revealed basics. That Jesus comes to be our Shepherd and Friend; that He knows our weaknesses, our needs, and our strengths. He loves us and walks with us daily as a Friend Who cares, and Who shares our sorrows and joys; our God Who shared our humanity.

Bible study helps us to know Christ!

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 1:1-14

1. We are introduced to the book of Acts (vs.1). Consult the Concordia Self-study Bible or another commentary for some background. Who is the inspired author? What is the “former book”? Who is Theophilus?
2. Make a list of Jesus post-resurrection appearances which provided “proof” (vs.3) that He was alive. (See these texts for some assistance: Matthew 28:1-20; Luke 24:1-53; John 20:1-29; I Corinthians 15:3-8).
3. How many days after Easter did Jesus’ ascension take place (vs. 3)?
4. What do we learn about Jesus second coming from vs. 11?
5. Vs. 8 provides a summary of the ever-expanding circle of mission outreach described in the book of Acts. The good news of the resurrection was proclaimed in _____, and in all _____ and _____, and _____ to _____.
6. According to vs. 14 what activity dominated the lives of early Christians? What encouragement do we find in their example?



Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 1:15-26

People will frequently read this passage and bring up the question of whether there is such a thing as “holy gambling.” (vs. 26) After all, lots were cast in order to choose the successor to Judas, but focusing on the fact that lots were used as an instrument of choosing misses the most important part of the process. They prayed!

Jesus was no longer in their midst as their teacher and constant physical companion. His presence was now that of the ascended and exalted spirit being. A decision had to be made and casting lots had been used in the Old Testament on several occasions to determine God’s will. This wasn’t gambling as much as it was asking God for a direction. Prayer made the difference.

When we face decisions in our own lives, it’s pretty easy to get caught up in the thought of, “What should *I* do?” Life is very busy and we are of a culture that tends to think that stopping to ask directions from God is somehow wasting our time and His as well. Nothing could be further from the truth. Martin Luther was only one of the Christian leaders that said that the busier and more stressful his day was going to be, the longer he spent in prayer before beginning. Luther knew that Jesus wants to be our mentor in every situation, whether it be a job change, illness, family problems, or even things that we would consider trivial. Jesus spent time conversing with His Father through prayer. How could anyone think that it is less necessary for us?

Choosing Judas’ successor was of great significance and in his “job requirements” Peter gives us a wonderful line that is so important for us to remember as we share the Gospel with others and with one another. He said that the applicant must “become a witness with us of his resurrection.” (vs. 22) This is the last Sunday of the Easter season.

 Our faith is based in the resurrected Lord, not the buried Lord, not the spiritually resurrected Lord, but the Lord who walked out of the tomb on Easter morning, declaring to us that His words and deeds were all true and that death had been conquered. He is Risen!

Bible study helps us to know Christ better!

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

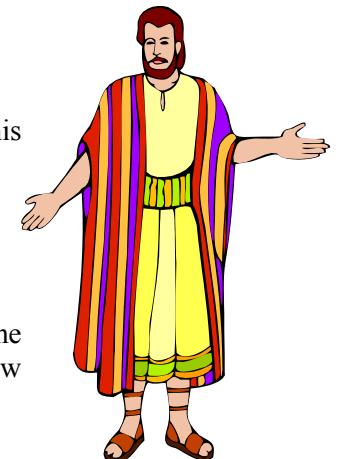
Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 1:15-26

1. The text begins “in those days” (vs. 15). What had just happened? What were some of the challenges of the small group of believers?

2. Peter reviews the tragedy of Judas. What had happened to this disciple of Jesus? How was the tragedy a fulfillment of Scripture (vs. 16)?

3. What were the “job qualifications” for this new apostle? (vs. 21-22)



4. Who met the qualification? How was the final choice made? Who was chosen? How was the process divinely guided?

5. How does this selection process compare with how pastors and other called workers are chosen today? How does the same Spirit still guide the process?

6. Another Easter season has concluded. How have you seen your resurrected Lord again this season? How has worship and Bible study strengthened your faith in the resurrected Jesus? What new joys of the resurrection are yours?

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 16:6-10

Do you ever wonder if God has a plan? Sometimes as we look at this crazy world, we can wonder. God doesn't mind if we wonder, only if we give up. Paul's experience in this passage gives us a new confidence that not only does God have a plan, it is specific.

Paul and his companions wanted to go to Asia, but the Holy Spirit said, "No." Then they determined to go to Bithynia, but Jesus said, "No." Finally, after reaching Troas, God sent a vision to Paul to go to Macedonia.

It's important to realize that Paul and the others did not just toss a dart into a map to decide the route of their missionary journey. They planned, prayed, and made the decisions that seemed to be right. We also do that, but we sometimes fail to do something just as important. We sometimes are not prepared to change direction at a moment's notice. Like Paul, we can never be right all of the time. Prayer is commanded by God and He does guide us and answer our prayers, but like Paul we will sometimes be puzzled to find that we did not start out in the right direction after all. Paul and his companions continued to pray for guidance after decisions were made; they never decided that God had nothing else to say, but they always remained alert, ready for a change. They did not approach the Lord with, "But God, we already decided that!" Does today's passage perhaps demonstrate that "flexibility" may be another gift of the Spirit?

Another really neat thing about today's lesson is that Paul's vision didn't specify that the province of Macedonia needed to hear God's good news in Jesus. It says that "a man of Macedonia" came to Paul in his vision. It wasn't by the command of an angel that God called Paul to the province, it was by the cry for help from the people there. Each of us is an integral part of God's plan; He thinks not just of the vast universe and its planets and creatures, He thinks of us each and our need for His love.



Bible study helps us to know Christ better!

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 16:6-10

1. Who are the "companions" (vs.6) of Paul at this time? Refer to Acts 15:40 and 16:1. Find out more about these fellow traveling missionaries.

2. How do we see the Holy Spirit's influence on the missionary activities in the early church? Is there any significance to the title "the Spirit of Jesus"?



3. Numerous locations are referred to in these few verses. Find a map of Paul's missionary journeys and trace the stops mentioned in these verses. Why does "Galatia" (vs. 6) sound particularly familiar?

4. Paul and his companions were directed by visions and other more direct interventions of the Spirit. How does God direct our journeys and our decisions today?

5. What task (vs.10) also directed the work of Paul and the other witnesses of the resurrection?

6. This is the last Sunday of the Easter season. How has the message of the resurrected Jesus impacted your life the past weeks? Is our Easter celebration over with?

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 1:1-14

Luke was an informed, intelligent, man of science. He was Greek and traveled extensively with that great theologian, St. Paul. God called him to write an account of Jesus' life and then to write Acts as a history of the early church. As we imagine Luke reflecting, probably with a scribe, and beginning his narrative, we can almost hear his voice as he speaks. What does he say to us in these early verses? A lot!

He tells us and Theophilus ("friend of God") that Jesus really did rise from the dead. He was not just a good man whose spirit was taken to heaven. He walked out of the tomb and talked and even ate with His followers. We need not doubt the resurrection.

Then Luke tells us that neither we nor the disciples can do anything on our own, even if we had had the blessing of seeing Jesus after His resurrection. Believers receive the blessing of faith and life direction from God. We must not think too highly of our own discerning wisdom, as tempting as that may be, for not even the apostles who accompanied Jesus throughout His earthly ministry really understood; instead, they wondered if Israel's political power would soon be re-established. Only the Holy Spirit can provide enlightenment and discernment.

We need not wonder or worry about whether or when Jesus will return. He assures us that He will come. While contemplating the "when" of His return may be interesting, there is a much more important task at hand. Jesus said to His apostles and to us, "*you shall be My witnesses...even to the remotest part of the earth.*"

Luke tells us and assures us of so much in these introductory verses. But, perhaps we can best identify with the first disciples in the words of the angel, "*why do you stand looking into the sky?*" The disciples were astounded at the glory that they had just witnessed; we are sometimes absorbed by the wonder of our salvation. But, like the first apostles and disciples, we also leave our musings and gather to pray that our Lord will guide us in our continuing ministry of the Gospel, both in our home towns and in the "*remotest part of the earth.*"

Learn more about Jesus' plans for His church in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 1:1-14

Exploring the Text:

1. What was the length of time between Jesus' resurrection and ascension? What did He do during that time?
2. Describe Jesus' ascension. (vs. 9-11) What does it mean that Jesus "will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven?"
3. Verse 8 presents an outline of the Book of Acts. Where was the proclamation of the resurrection to begin? How far would the Gospel message go? By whose power would the disciples preach?

Family Table Talks:

4. How many of the disciples can you name? Check your list with the verses of Acts 1:13. Which of the original twelve disciples is missing from the list? Why?
5. "They all joined together constantly in prayer." (vs. 14) When does your family pray together? What things does your family pray about? For whom might you pray today?
6. Today is the last Sunday of the Easter season. What was special about your Easter worship and meditation this year? How do we keep the joy of Easter going in our home? In our church? With whom can we share our joy and hope?

Seventh Sunday of Easter

1 John 4:13-21

Many people today doubt what the Gospels say about Jesus. Especially in the weeks just before Easter we are annually greeted with newly found revelations about what Jesus was really like, or what really happened to Him. It's amazing how many secular magazines and television networks that profess to have no connection whatsoever to religion suddenly have the inside information on Christ. Yet, these same entities reject the eyewitness accounts available to anyone who can read a book or listen to an audio production. John, Matthew, and Mark personally traveled with Jesus! Paul talked with the resurrected Jesus and his life took an immediate 180 degree turn. Luke, an educated man, interviewed many eyewitnesses before writing his accounts of Jesus' life and the early church. Go figure!

In verse 14 John lets us in on why he has been so persistent and positive in his teaching throughout chapter 4. John has seen Jesus. He has traveled with Jesus and sat at His feet to hear what God has to say. Through Jesus Himself, John learned to love, and learned what great love God has for all people. How could John respond except to teach the truth to all who would hear?

John *knows* (vs.16) that God's love in us and for us will grant us the confidence to leave fear behind and spend out energy on loving instead. This is true for us because "...He first loved us."

How will you demonstrate God's love this week? Who is there in your life that needs to sense the love of God? Who is there that you can lift up from despair by simply caring and listening? We are getting ready to leave the season of Easter and enter the season of Pentecost. In the weeks ahead we will again hear of the life and teaching of Jesus as He traveled in His earthly ministry. Like John, we will learn how to live like Jesus and how to demonstrate His love to our world. He is risen indeed!

Learn more about Jesus' love for all people in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Seventh Sunday of Easter

1 John 4:13-21

1. What had the Apostle John witnessed? (vs. 14) If there any doubt that Jesus is alive?
2. What amazing blessing takes place when Jesus Christ is confessed? (vs. 13, 15)
3. Do we have to fear God's punishment on the last day? Why not? What peace do you have became of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection?
4. Can the Christian choose who and when to love? (review vs. 19-21)

For Family Reflection

5. Is there anyone whom you find difficult to love? How can these words help you in that struggle?
6. The Easter season concludes this Sunday. How have you been blessed with the Good News of Jesus' resurrection the last seven week? Is Easter really over? How will your home and church continue to be an Easter place?

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Revelation 22:1-20

Today's verses conclude John's account of his vision. He emphasizes its truth with the warning to not change what he has said. His words contain a strong "Don't edit this!" What he has seen is more than a dream—John's vision was as real as the light of day and the dark of night, even though some critics claim that John pulled his account from his imagination. But then, the world tends to make this claim concerning any supernatural experience or event in Scripture.

So, what are the conclusions reflected in today's verses? The resurrection of Jesus did not end God's relationship with our world. Jesus' victory over death was not the end of the story, yet it will be the end of the story. We *are* in the kingdom of God, and we *will be* in the kingdom of God. Jesus has come to our world, but He will come to it again. In our baptism we are resurrected to a new life, but we shall be resurrected to a new life on the last day. We *now* belong to God, and we will *someday* belong to God—but without the frustration of sin, pain, or doubt. When Christ returns, all that is already ours will be made perfect and complete.

It is confusing, but clear. We now belong to Christ; He has defeated death; we are in His kingdom. Yet, we still know sin. We too often accede to its demands, and we too often suffer because of its presence in our world. In John's vision, he sees what is already assured to us—that Jesus will return in glory; Jesus will rule; sin will be removed from our lives and our world; God will be worshiped by all.

In these final verses, Jesus assures us that He is the Sender of John's vision. No matter what we think we see going on in the world, God is still in control. Jesus' return is "on schedule."

Jesus will be "coming quickly." His return will not be a long process. The world will be in the midst of pursuing its plan when suddenly the Son of God will appear to proclaim His ownership. Until then, we are to remain ready, going about our own work of proclaiming Christ to all those around us.

Learn more about Jesus' plans for you in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Revelation 22:1-20

1. How are the gardens of Genesis 2 and Revelation 22 alike?
How are the gardens different?
2. What do we learn about God's Word in vs. 6 and vs. 18-19?
Why is it important that God's Word is accepted as truth and is kept in its truth?
3. How many different names for Jesus do we find in this chapter?
4. Why was John tempted to worship an angel? (vs. 8) What strong directive does the angel give in vs. 9? What do we learn from the angel's words?

For Family Reflection

5. In the last seven weeks we have been blessed to study sections of the Book of Revelation. What is the most important message of the Book? What is your favorite part or illustration of the Book?
6. This is the last Sunday of the Easter season. Is Easter ever over? How can we remember the Easter message every Sunday? How can we live as Easter people in our family every day?

Seventh Sunday of Easter

John 17:1-11

In the last hours before His passion, Jesus gathers with His disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem. In that setting He prays to His Father. In this prayer, Jesus demonstrates clearly who He is and what His ministry has been about. He has been given authority over all mankind and offers Himself up for the salvation of all. Jesus says, “This is eternal life that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent.” Sounds simple, but think of the cost!

Jesus proclaims His eternal being with the words, “...the glory which I had with You before the world began.” At the beginning of his Gospel account John wrote, “In the beginning was the Word (that is, Jesus) and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. ...apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:1-3). Christ was at the creation! Christ was involved in the creation!

We come again to the question of cost! God became incarnate; Jesus gave up His glory to come to show us God. We will never fully understand the Trinity of God, but we have Jesus’ words to teach us that God became Man; God the Son showed us God, and God the Father confirmed all that the Son said, taught, and did—through the resurrection. God the Holy Spirit kept Jesus’ followers strong in their faith. God the Son allowed Himself to be crucified. He was even separated from God the Father in order to pay for our sin Himself. Imagine the anguish of Jesus on the cross when He cried out, “My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?” He, the sinless One, paying for our great sin.

The next time you or a friend are tempted to take the awesome gift of salvation lightly, remember the cost! When someone asks you why we should stand and boldly tell the world about our Savior, tell them about the cost, too.

Is Bible study in your schedule this week?

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Seventh Sunday of Easter

John 17:1-11

1. John chapters 14-17 record a conversation of Jesus. Glance at chapter 13. What is the context of the conversation? Who is Jesus conversing with? What are some of the topics that have been covered in chapters 14-16? Glance ahead to chapter 18. What is about to happen to Jesus?
2. Verses 1-5 of chapter 17 include one petition. Who is Jesus praying for in these verses? What word is often repeated? Summarize Jesus’ prayer in these verses.
3. Verses 5-11 are part of another petition. Who is Jesus praying for in these verses? Summarize Jesus’ prayer in these verses.
4. According to vs. 3 Who is the only way to heaven? How does this verse provide mission motivation?

For Family Reflection

5. What can we learn about prayer by listening to Jesus pray? Jesus prays that His disciples would be protected. Why was this prayer important for them? From what do we need protection? How are we protected?
6. This is the last Sunday of the Easter season. How has your family celebrated the risen Jesus the last seven weeks? How will your family keep the Easter celebration going in your church and home?

Seventh Sunday of Easter

John 17:11-19

Praying for the disciples, and us, Jesus said, “I do not ask You to take them out of the world....” Many people, and religions, think that the only hope that one has is to be taken out of this world. Jesus says that this is not His will for us.

Jesus prayed to His Father, “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” In Matthew 28, He commanded us to “...make disciples of all the nations....” That passage could be translated, “While you’re going...make disciples....” While we are out in the world, doing whatever it is that we do each day, our lives should be telling everyone that Jesus is our Savior and the Lord of the universe. We are left in the world so that our very presence will inspire others to seek God’s Kingdom.

We already belong to Christ. When He returns we will be taken to His side and remain with Him in His Kingdom forever. There are many millions, even in our own society, who will know terror and condemnation when He returns. We are called to be the lovers of these lost people. Jesus sends us out into our communities to invite strangers into God’s house; invite them out of a hopeless and sin-filled existence into a new life, free from condemnation and eternal death. We are still here because we are not the only ones whom Jesus loves and died for.

As we close this Easter season, remember that to many, many people around us, Easter is still chocolate bunnies and colored eggs. Jesus prayed to His Father for us, that we might have the courage and the love to tell the world that Easter is really about an empty tomb.

Are you part of a Bible study group? If not, please consider joining one.
(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Seventh Sunday of Easter

John 17:11-19

1. Read John 17. What is Jesus doing in this chapter? Who is Jesus praying for in vs. 6-19?
2. Why does Jesus pray that the disciples be protected? What dangers would they face? What assurances did they have?
3. What was the disciples’ relationship with the world? Does the world still hate disciples of Jesus?

For Family Reflection

4. “Your word is _____.” What is the core truth of the Bible? (John 14:6) Is everything in the Bible true?
5. Does Jesus also send us into the world? (vs. 18) What message do we carry to the world? Will Jesus also protect us?
6. We have completed the Easter season. How has the Easter message blessed your life the last seven weeks? Why does the joy of Easter go beyond the seven weeks of a season?

Seventh Sunday of Easter

John 17:20-26

These verses comprise part of Jesus' prayer in behalf of the disciples, and in behalf of you and me. What a wonderful blessing to contemplate, and what a challenge.

Jesus painted a picture of who we are in Him and why. He prayed that we may be in unity with one another and with God. He prayed that we may be with Him so that we can see His glory in His kingdom. He said that He will continue to reveal the Father to us through Himself. Knowing how urgently Jesus prayed for us should give us just a taste of our great value to Him and His great love for us.

But there is more in Jesus' prayer than unity and love. There is an urgent mission to accomplish through that unity and love. At the end of verse 21 is the phrase, "...so that the world may believe that You have sent Me." Verse 23 says, "...to let the world know that You have sent Me..." These words are for you and for me. It was after Jesus included us in His prayer to the Father that He said these words of blessing and mission.

We can no longer claim that the job of letting the world know about Jesus' love is just for pastors and paid staff.

Pastors are our leaders, our teachers, our trainers, and our co-workers in getting the gospel out, but they aren't the only ones called to tell the world about the Savior. It is also a command from Jesus to us. To put this into perspective—when your church was built what if the architect sent his assistant out to the property with a hammer and piles of wood and bricks, saying, "Get started"? Would your church be standing today? Another example—what if General Eisenhower had sent his assistant generals to storm the French beaches in World War II? No troops—just the generals.

God can do anything He wants. He could flick a finger and turn everyone into dedicated Christians, but He chose to use us to spread the word of salvation. If we ignore His command, we will not lose our salvation, but neither will we be working within God's will.

Jesus described the very best way of sharing Christ—sharing our unity and His love. We can be the Holy Spirit's tools in drawing people to listen to Him. Churches whose members love one another and display the love of Christ in their communities are more likely to draw an unbeliever's attention to Christ. Christians, you and I, who allow Christ's love to dwell deeply in our hearts can be a mighty witness to the world around us.

Let God's Word bless you in a special way this Easter season.

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Seventh Sunday of Easter

John 17:20-26

1. Jesus begins a new petition in vs. 20. Glance back at the previous verses. Who was Jesus praying for when He prayed for "them" (vs. 11, 12, 19)?
2. Who is Jesus praying for in vs. 20ff? What is His prayer for us in vs. 21?
3. What is Jesus' ultimate desire for us and for the world (vs. 23-24)?
4. Why can't the world naturally know Jesus (vs. 25)? How does the world find out about Jesus? Who brings people of the world to faith in Jesus?

For Family Reflection

5. Have there been times when the individuals in our family or in our church have not been "one" (vs. 21-22)? What does "oneness" look like? How does "oneness" give glory to God and bless His church?
6. Another Easter "season" is completed! How has your faith grown the past seven weeks? How will the Easter joy continue to be evident in your life and family? Is the Easter season ever really over?