
When is Easter This Year?

A letter for Holy Week 2016

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Oh my, Easter has arrived so suddenly this year!

Where did the time go? I know that my calendar has indicated March 27 as Easter for some time now. But my calendar is only as good as the number of times I have checked it. And sometimes I don't check it. A lot of my life is not related to calendar at all. As much as I try to keep appointments and schedules and deadlines and starting times, I have come to realize that the most important events of my life are not related to calendar time at all.

There are beautiful times in my life when calendar dates make no difference at all. When I have a joyous moment with children or grandchildren, or that moment last week when I hugged my mother and father again. Or an unexpected night alone with my wife. Or maybe that walk in the neighborhood that I had not scheduled at all. Or maybe it was during the Sunday worship service, actually praying, when it did not matter to me at all when the service was going to end. Those are holy moments. The Bible knows them as *kairos* time ("holy" time, "divine" time, "out-of-the-ordinary" time) as opposed to *chronos* time (which is "clock" time, the time we use clocks for).

There is a movement afoot, across the Christian world, to set the date of Easter on a fixed date. I don't know what possibilities people are proposing - say the first Sunday in April, or something - but I am opposed to the idea. I don't think we should fix the date on a set Sunday of the regular calendar year.

Instead, I think the present complicated way of figuring the day of Easter makes all the divine sense in the world. God's holiness, the great resurrection joy of Easter, simply cannot be confined to a set calendar day in the year. Sure, the set date would make our planning easier - especially those events that we like to plan years ahead.

But the tradition of a movable date for Easter is important to our spiritual lives. The fact that Easter arrives on a different Sunday every year reminds us that God lives beyond our earthly calendars, beyond our earthly ways of telling time. If we are going to celebrate Easter, we are going to have to intentionally work on it. It is not going to simply occur, like any other calendar day.

By the way, our formula for determining the annual date of Easter is given clearly in the Book of Common Prayer on page 15. It is the first Sunday, after the full moon that falls on or after March 21 (roughly, on or after the Spring Equinox). That lovely formula is based on not one, not two, but three sorts of calendars: the solar calendar, the lunar calendar, and our rather human weekly calendar. None of those calendars fits each other exactly each year. They move around.

God moves around, too. The resurrection moves around, too. The moment we think we have it down, God surprises us with something else entirely. I call those surprises Easter moments, moments when new life blooms into our lives. In fact, resurrection moments are not confined to Easter day at all. They happen all through the year, as long as we are open to the love of God in our lives.

Oh my! Easter has arrived suddenly! Yes, of course Easter arrives suddenly - and surprisingly, and astoundingly, and lovingly. That is the way of God.

When is Easter this year? Every year, we gather simply - and gloriously - to mark that unpredictable love of God. Yes, we do observe a date for Easter, because in so doing we make every day available for resurrection and new life. But join us not just on the day, but throughout the year! Even if you cannot be in church, give something for Easter this year. Join the resurrection life!

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Very Rev. Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

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