

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama

Volume XXX, Number 4

April 2023



April 2023

This Month's Cover

In honor of the Feast of St. Mark the Evangelist (April 25), our cover this month is an illustration from the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, a late 15^h century encyclopedia of historical and biblical events. It depicts Saint Mark pointing out a passage in a codex (a bound volume rather than a scroll) of his gospel. At the lower right is a winged lion, representing the angel who was his mentor and inspiration. Saint Jerome (347- 413) associated each of the Evangelists with a creature (man for Matthew, lion for Mark, bull for Luke, and eagle for John). We could not find the exact size of the illustration, but it could not have been more than a few inches on a side. The illustrations were all woodcuts whose designs were overseen by the Nuremberg painters Michael Wolgemut and Wilhelm Pleydenwurff, to whom all the woodcuts were to be returned after the printing. In those days, if woodcuts were to be colored, they were usually printed in black ink and then hand-colored. Published in 1493, the *Nuremberg Chronicle* is one of the earliest and most thoroughly documented printed books. It was written in Latin by Hartmann Schedel, a prominent Nuremberg physician and book collector. It was translated into German by Georg Alt, and then published in both languages. It is one of the first printed books to integrate illustrations and text successfully. Latin scholars call it the *Liber Chronicarum* (Book of Chronicles) and Germans call it *Die Schedelsche Weltchronik* (Schedel's World History), but since its publication it has been known in English as the *Nuremberg Chronicle*. Today about four hundred copies survive.

Richard R. Losch+

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A Word from the Editor

In 1640 the Puritan British Parliament banned the celebration of Christmas, and in protest a broadside spread through London with a new ballad, "The World Turned Upside Down." The first stanza was

Listen to me and you shall hear, news hath not been this
thousand year:

Since Herod, Caesar, and many more, you never heard the
like before.

Holy-days are despis'd, new fashions are devis'd.
Old Christmas is kickt out of Town.

Yet let's be content, and the times lament, you see the world
turn'd upside down.

American legend has it that Cornwallis's band played it at his surrender at Yorktown, but this is doubtful, since there is no written reference to that anywhere until a hundred years later. Even so, when a rag-tag army of colonial militias defeated the world's mightiest military force, it must have seemed to the British that the world had turned upside down. Most of us today also think that the world is turned upside down, but it maybe no more so than it has ever been. Ecclesiastes said that there is nothing new under the sun. The world has always been topsy-turvy, just in different ways from generation to generation. Our leaders lie to us, but there is nothing new in that. Boys think they are girls, but there is nothing new in that—Nero dressed his slave Sporus up like a girl, married him, and declared him to be the Empress of Rome. Insane laws are passed and insane movements accepted, but again, there is nothing new in that. From the dawn of history, every generation has embraced its inane and insane ideas, and yet every generation seems to have survived. It is very likely that we will, too. As I see it, the best way to keep our own sanity is not to be so tied to the things of this world that we get turned upside down with it. We have God, the Bible, the Church (as upside down as it can sometimes be), and the Faith to help keep us on an even keel, and we must not let the world get in their way.

Father Rick Loock

Be Wordly Wise

Sympathy

Today we think of sympathy as feeling sorry for someone else's misfortune, but this is a relatively modern and quite limited use that loses a great deal of its full meaning. The word came into English in the late 16th century via Latin, from the Greek *sympatheia* (συμπαθεια), which comes from *syn-* (συν), with or together, and *pathos* (παθος), feeling.¹ Sympathy literally means "feeling with," or sharing the feelings of others. The Anglicized Latin equivalent is compassion (*con-*, together, and *passio*, feelings). When we feel sorry for the woes of others, we are sharing their feelings, or feeling together with them. That is a valid meaning, but it is not the only one. When a group of people are enjoying something together, they are sharing feelings, so they are also having sympathy with one another.

Richard R. Losch+

Ancient Sumerian Tavern Discovered

Archaeology often focuses on great temples, monuments and palaces, because the rich and powerful tend to leave the most buildings and possessions, while those of the poor were usually few and perishable. This leaves us with the impression that most ancient societies were polarized, being made up almost exclusively of a very rich elite and a large population of oppressed and impoverished masses. In fact, almost all ancient and medieval societies had a significant middle class that was made up of merchants, skilled craftsmen, and what today we call professionals (physicians, teachers, accountants, etc.).² These middle classes were much smaller than the middle class

¹ When words are combined in most Western languages, if an *n* precedes a *p* or *b*, it usually converts to an *m*. Therefore, we get sympathy rather than synpathy.

² In the Roman era the majority of these professionals were slaves (most often Greeks), but they were very well treated, and usually had a far more comfortable lifestyle than the average freeman.

in modern western society, yet they were an important part of the culture and the economy. They did not have much wealth, but they generally had enough income to be able to be independent, live relatively freely, enjoy a few moderate luxuries, and for the most part make their own decisions.

Often the social centers for these middle classes were local taverns, just as the pub is a social center for much of lower- and middle-class Great Britain today. Archaeologists recently uncovered one of the oldest taverns in the world. They were excavating the city of Lagash, a Sumerian city about 200 miles southeast of Baghdad, when they found the extremely well-preserved remains of a tavern dating to about 2700 BC. This was about the same time that Gilgamesh ruled in nearby Uruk, and it is a period that is almost universally regarded to be the dawn of Western Civilization. This discovery sheds a great deal of light not only on the food culture of early Mesopotamia, but also on the culture and activities of the middle class.

It is amazing that the tavern survived almost 5000 years, because it was found buried only a few inches below the surface. Fortunately, the tranquil climate of the region helped in its preservation. It consisted of a kitchen and an open-air dining area. The kitchen had a stove, an oven, and a deep pit used for cooling. The dining area was furnished with benches that apparently also served as tables. There were about 150 serving dishes, some still containing remnants of food. The food seems to have been mainly some kind of fish stew, and there were also the remains of other meat animals. There was evidence of beer, which was the common drink at the time, and was an important commercial product in ancient Mesopotamia.

The existence of a place like this, where common people could socialize over a pot of fish stew and a bowl of beer, shows that the people were not enslaved by a tyrannical government, but had at least a modicum of freedom. This also gives us a broader and more human picture of the city and its daily life. Lagash was one of the oldest and largest cities in Sumer during the third millennium BC. It was a center of

commerce and trade, and its location near the marshlands provided an abundance of fish and game, as well as a robust agriculture. The discovery of this tavern and what it represents reminds us that people are basically the same, wherever they may be found geographically or in history. Cultures and political structures may vary, but basic human pleasures do not.

Richard R. Losch+

Animal Sacrifice in Ancient Times (Part II)

(Continued from last month)

The Jewish concept of ritual sacrifice, while rooted in ancient Mesopotamian paganism, was significantly more sophisticated and mature than the pagan concept. Many ancient peoples believed that their gods physically resided in their temples, were present in their idols, and were nurtured by eating the food that was sacrificed to them. Although Abraham, Isaac and Jacob knew better, their understanding of God was still primitive, and many of the Israelites, after their captivity in Egypt, had slipped back to the old pagan thinking. Nonetheless, by the time of the Exodus, at least the better-educated Israelites had long outgrown this simplistic view. Although Aaron made the golden calf (the Egyptian god Apis), he did so because he surrendered to the demands of the people, not because he himself believed in it. When Moses and Aaron built the tabernacle in the wilderness, they did not believe that God physically lived in it. Rather, because it housed the Ark of the Covenant, they saw it as an intersection or meeting point between God and man. Likewise, when Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem, it was seen as the focal point of the communion between God and the Israelites, not as the literal residence of God.¹ The primary religious function of the Temple was the offering of sacrifices, mainly animal sacrifices, but they did not believe that

¹ We refer to a church as the House of God, but no one is so naïve as to think that God physically lives there. Christianity teaches that the Temple ceased being the point of unity between God and man when Christ became incarnate. He is now the center of that union, replacing the Temple.

these sacrifices were food for God.¹

Many ancient peoples practiced human sacrifice, frequently of infants or young children, believing that giving the god a gift of a human life would either please him or at least allay his anger. To the Jews, of course, this was abhorrent. They offered the lives of animals in lieu of and symbolic of human life, in atonement for human sin. These sacrifices were offered for all the people, not for individuals. An individual might donate a valuable animal, but he would have understood that the offering of atonement was not for his personal sins, but for the sins of the whole nation. Ancient Judaism put far more emphasis on the relationship between God and his people as a whole than on one's personal relationship with God. Sacrifices were offered for three reasons: (1) to atone for the sins of the people, (2) to sanctify human activities and seek God's blessing and support of them, and (3) in thanksgiving for God's blessings.

The word "sacrifice" derives from the Latin meaning to do a holy thing.² In modern usage it often means to give up something valuable or important, but that was not its original meaning. Originally it meant to make something holy by sharing it with God, in recognition that he gave it to us in the first place. Originally, the Israelites could offer sacrifices anywhere, although once a sacrifice had been offered, the place was thereafter considered a holy place. Some of these places became shrines where sacrifice was offered regularly (Gen. 35:1). After the Exodus, the Levites (the tribe of Levi, which was Moses' and Aaron's tribe) were designated as the hereditary priests. Only Levites could offer sacrifice. When Joshua assigned each tribe a territory in Canaan, the Levites were not given one, but were spread throughout all twelve tribal lands

¹ As was the case in most ancient religions, the meat that was not burned as part of the sacrifice was distributed as food for the priests, aristocracy and royalty. Unlike the pagans (except during a few unusually corrupt periods), in Judaism the meat was not sold or used for Temple feasts.

² It comes from the Latin *sacrum*, holy rite, and *facere*, to make or do.

so that there would be sacrificing priests available to all.¹ When King David united the tribes into the United Monarchy of Israel, he captured the city of Jerusalem and made it his capital. He moved the Ark of the Covenant there and built a Tabernacle to house it. Thereafter Jerusalem became more and more the center of the worship of all the nation, and sacrifice elsewhere became increasingly rare. In the mid-10th century BC Solomon built the first Temple in Jerusalem, and from that time on the only legal place to offer sacrifice was in the Temple, which became the focal point of all the worship of the Jews. Sacrifices were offered there constantly, but only by the Temple priests.² These were carefully regulated under the Law as described in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The people often brought their own animals and agricultural goods to be offered in sacrifice, but the actual sacrifice was made only by Levitical priests.³

There were certain feasts when a very special sacrifice was offered, and the one that has the most significance to Christians is Passover. Each Passover, in recognition of the lambs whose blood was put on the doorposts to save the Israelites at the Exodus (Exod. 12:2ff), a lamb was sacrificed. This was the Paschal (Passover) Lamb,⁴ and they believed that God would

¹ Only eleven of Jacob's twelve sons were eponymous patriarchs of tribes. Joseph did not have a tribe, but his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh did, making thirteen tribes. Of these, however, the tribe of Levi had no land, so we refer to the twelve landed tribes as the "Twelve Tribes of Israel."

² The High Priest and a staff of elite priests oversaw all the Temple operations and lived in Jerusalem, but sacrificing priests from all over the country served terms of a few weeks in the Temple on a rotating basis. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, was one of these (Lk. 1:5ff).

³ By law the offerings had to be perfect and without blemish, so they were carefully inspected by the priests before they were accepted. As a service to the worshipers, the Temple priests provided unblemished animals for a reasonable price. In time they discovered that this could be very profitable, however, and it developed into a lucrative business. It was these merchants of sacrificial animals that Jesus drove out of the Temple (Lk. 19:45f).

⁴ From the Greek *Pascha* (Πάσχα), which in turn comes from the Hebrew *Pesach* (פסח), Passover.

accept this offering in atonement for the sin of the nation. When John the Baptist pointed out Jesus as “the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world,” his hearers would have understood that he was referring to the Paschal Lamb. The atoning sacrifices in the Temple had to be repeated regularly, and as Christ was dying on the cross, the Paschal sacrifice was being offered once again in the Temple. Christian theology teaches that when Christ offered himself on the cross as both Priest and Victim, he offered the final sacrifice for all time. As we say in the Prayer of Consecration in the Holy Eucharist, he “made there, by his one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.”¹ Although the Temple survived almost four more decades and continued its sacrifices until its destruction in AD 70, it was no longer relevant. The eternal sacrifice of the Incarnate Son of God, was sufficient for all mankind for all time, and no other sacrifice was necessary.² Jewish animal sacrifice ended with the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, and was never resumed. The Levitical priesthood became irrelevant, and the rabbinical teaching ministry grew to become the mainstay of Judaism. To Christians, particularly in the Catholic branches of the Church (Roman, Orthodox, most Anglican and some Lutheran), we participate in the eternal sacrifice of Christ every time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist. That sacrifice, however, is for all time, and need never be repeated. We participate in it, we do not re-offer it.

Richard R. Losch+

*Why do they lock gas station bathrooms?
Are they afraid someone will clean them?*

¹ Book of Common Prayer 1979, Eucharistic Rite I.

² We are all expected to make sacrifices in the modern sense of the word, even to the giving up of our own lives if we are called to do so. Sacrifice in the ancient liturgical sense, however, is no longer expected, because Christ’s eternal sacrifice on the Cross was sufficient for all time.

They Gave Him Vinegar to Drink

We tend to think of ancient people as drinking mainly wine, but often that was not the case. Except among the elite, the drink of choice among most people, including in the Western Hemisphere, was beer. It is said that one of the first achievements of human civilization was brewing beer. Ancient beers were very strong (like modern ultra-stout ales), and were usually much stronger than wine. When the Bible refers to “strong drink” (Deut. 9:6 et al.) it means beer, not whiskey, which was unknown.¹ Beer was much more popular than wine in Egypt, even among the rich. The Greek Egyptians (after Alexander’s conquest) drank wine, but the native Egyptians still preferred beer. The Romans introduced wine to the Gauls, and thereafter it became popular among the Gallic elite, who bought it from Roman merchants. The common Gauls still preferred beer.

There were three notable exceptions. For those who could afford it, wine was the drink of choice among the Greeks, the Romans, and the Israelites. One of the likely reasons for this is that these regions produced the best wine grapes, and the spores of some of the finest brewer’s yeasts are in the air there, so good fermented grape juice was plentiful. Nonetheless, wine was relatively expensive and most people’s incomes were meager, so they often had to settle for less. For those who could not afford even cheap wine (which was most of the population in ancient times), beer was cheaper, but still costly.

The Romans came up with a cheap answer to the problem of cost that soon became very popular with the Roman poor. That was a drink called *posca*. It was supplied to soldiers as part of their rations, it was all that the poorest Romans could afford, and it was the only drink normally provided to slaves. It was a mixture of wine vinegar, spices, honey and water. Although it was a bracing and thirst-quenching drink, it had little nutritional value. The name comes from the Greek *epoxos* (εποχος),

¹ Distilled liquors were not known until the distillation of alcohol was discovered by European alchemists in the Middle Ages.

very sharp or sour. Since the vinegar came from cheap wines or wines that had gone sour, posca could not have been a very tasty beverage, yet the poor still considered it superior to water. Ancient documents provide a recipe for it if you would like to try it: 1½ cups of brewed (not distilled) red wine vinegar, ½ cup of honey, 1 tbsp. of crushed coriander seed, and 4 cups of water. Boil the mixture until the honey dissolves, cool, and filter out the seeds. Serve at room temperature.

When the New Testament refers to vinegar or sour wine (Luke 23:36, John 19:29), it means posca. John tells us that there was a jar of it near the foot of the Cross. That would have been for the soldiers, and was the equivalent of modern soldiers on duty having a nearby container of water. It was a part of their normal rations. Luke says, “The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine” (the KJV calls it vinegar). The mockery was not that it was sour, but that posca was the drink of slaves and the very lowest classes. John’s account, on the other hand, may have an overtone of mercy on the part of the soldiers. Jesus said, “I thirst,” and the soldiers soaked a sponge in posca (their own drink), put it on a reed and held it up to his lips. This may have been mockery as in Luke’s account, but considering John’s close attention to detail he probably would have said so if that was how he saw it.

There is no direct evidence that posca was ever popular among the Jews, but at least after the Roman occupation of Palestine they certainly would have known about it, and it is likely that it was drunk by many of the very poor.

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The Epistle is Online

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Richard R. Losch+

Souvenirs from the Holy Land

Just about everyone who visits the Holy Land brings back souvenirs of some kind, and there is nothing new about this. From the earliest days of Christianity pilgrims have brought home everything from stones and soil to blessed oil and water from the Jordan River. In fact, this long precedes Christianity. There is little doubt that ancient pilgrims to Jerusalem for Passover and Shavuoth brought home souvenirs of their pilgrimage. Souvenirs help us recall past events, and tend to bind us to our memories and strengthen them, and this is fine. It is important that we also remember, however, that they are nothing more than that—stimulants to memories. It is all too easy to slip into idolatry and assign to them some special powers. Even though a stone came from a path that Jesus walked, it is nonetheless nothing more than just a stone. It has absolutely no more power to impart special blessing or grace than does a stone from your own back yard. Some people treat water from the Jordan as if it is something sacred—the water that Jesus was baptized in! No, the water that Jesus was baptized in flowed into the Dead Sea and evaporated 2000 years ago. It is just water from a Palestinian river, and not a very clean one at that. It is a precious symbol if it reminds us of Jesus' baptism and leads us to meditate on what that means for us, but it imparts no special blessing or grace other than the grace of reminding us of Christ. It has no magic, and it will not bring us good luck. To think of it otherwise is idolatrous. Relics of the saints are the same. They are actually little more than souvenirs. Despite the ignorant abuses of relics during the Middle Ages, they have no power other than to focus our minds and meditations on the achievements of the saints, and may inspire us to want to emulate them. To assign to these relics any special powers such as healing or purification is also idolatry. If they focus our minds on the saints and strengthen our understanding of our unity with them in the Communion of the Saints, they serve a valuable purpose. If we try to turn them into magical talismans, we are in danger.

Richard R. Losch+

God Is Love

John tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8), but especially in translation this opens itself up to a broad variety of interpretations. Just what does “God is love” really mean? You can love God, your spouse, your child, your friend, your pet, your favorite movie, and warm apple pie, but you love each of them in a different way. English is one of the richest languages in the world, yet it is seriously deficient in its variety of words for love. Greek has several, but the one that the Bible consistently uses to refer to God’s love is *agape* and its several derivatives (*αγαπη*, pronounced *ah'-gah-pay*).¹ There is no English equivalent to *agape*. The closest we can come is something like “Christian love” or “Godly love.” It is unconditional, sacrificial love that seeks nothing in return. To say that God is love means that despite the fact that we turn from him, sin, and disobey his will, he still loves us. This is not at all to say that God is like foolish doting parents in whose eyes their children can do no wrong. Rather, his love is like that of ideal parents who love their children so much that for the children’s sake they will teach, discipline and if necessary punish them, and will make any sacrifice to help them. This analogy can be taken further, however. Even perfect parents can occasionally have children who turn from them, disrespect and disobey them, and sometimes even hate them. While the parents are grieved over this, they do not cease loving their wayward children. So it is with God’s love for his wayward human family.

We often tend to bandy the word love about carelessly, and

¹ Greek has many words for various kinds of love, but the four chief ones are *agape*, *philia*, *eros* and *storge*. *Agape* is described above; *philia* (φιλία), “brotherly love,” is the love we have for a friend; *eros* (ερος), from which we get the word erotic, is love that is expressed in physical contact. It is not lust (*lagneia*, λαγνεία), but genuine love that is expressed in anything from a hug or kiss to truly loving sexual contact; *storge* (στοργή) is the love we have for small children and pets, and the love they express to us. For a deeper exploration of these, we recommend C. S. Lewis’s *The Four Loves*.

this can weaken its true meaning. We speak of “making love” all too often when what we really mean is lasciviously indulging in sexual contact in order to satisfy one’s own desires, with little genuine concern for the partner. This is not making love, it is making lust. It is using another human being for one’s own pleasure, and that is always sinful. Sexuality is a beautiful thing as an expression of true love, but it is degrading and destructive when it is used simply for physical pleasure.

We speak of God’s love, but we have to realize that we must speak of it in human terms, because that is all we experience in this world. God’s love transcends human understanding. Human love always has a faint overtone of selfish self-directedness, a desire for personal fulfillment, and an interest in personal desires. God’s love is totally selfless and self-sacrificing, even to the end that God the Son, purely out of love for his creation, was willing to take humanity upon himself, suffer and die, and rise again in order to redeem us from our sin. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn. 15:13); “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16).

As we have pointed out many times, love is a choice, not an emotion. Liking someone is an emotion over which we have very little control. To love someone, however, is to choose to seek to comprehend his needs, to try to understand him, to “walk in his shoes,” and to be concerned for his welfare rather than for his harm, even if he is our enemy or a total stranger. It is easy to do this for those we like, and even for those in whom we otherwise have little interest, but it is hard to do it for those whom we dislike or even hate, and even harder for those whom we know dislike or hate us. This is why there is no virtue in loving the lovable. It is also why Jesus rarely spoke of praying for our friends, but commanded us to love our enemies and pray for those who spitefully use us.

To say that God is love also speaks of his freedom. He is under no obligation to love a sinful world that has turned from

him and often works directly against him. Nonetheless he has chosen to love us. It is a free choice, and he has given us the freedom to accept that love and respond to it, or, if we so choose, to turn our backs on it and live as we wish.

It is important to understand that this is not a “deal” in which if we fail to respond to God’s love, he will send us to Hell. Despite millions of sermons over the centuries, God has never sent anyone to Hell. He simply respects our choice to go there, and because he gave us freedom and honors that gift, he will not interfere with our choice. The obvious question is, why would anyone choose to go to Hell? Except perhaps in a few very sick minds, it is not a conscious choice, but it is nonetheless a choice. When you need to get to the other side of the street and there is traffic coming, you do not think, “I choose not to get hit by that truck, so I will wait here for a moment.” If you are even conscious that you are making a choice, it is just that it is not a good idea cross quite yet. Likewise, we do not directly choose to go to Hell, we simply choose sinful activities that lead to that destination. God will not violate our freedom to make bad choices by intervening, but he will show us the right path to avoid them. If we choose to reject that help, so be it. It is because of his love that he does not force us into the right way. To do so would make us his slaves, and slaves obey because they have no other choice, not because of love. Even though we are free to love or to ignore God, the choice is not optional for Christians. The divine love that Jesus teaches (and displays) is wholly consistent with the Old Testament as well as the New. God showers upon us a holy, righteous and merciful love, and if we are to have everlasting life with him we must, to the best of our poor ability, return it to him directly as well as through the way we relate to mankind.

Richard R. Losch+

*What do you do when you see an endangered animal
eating an endangered plant?*

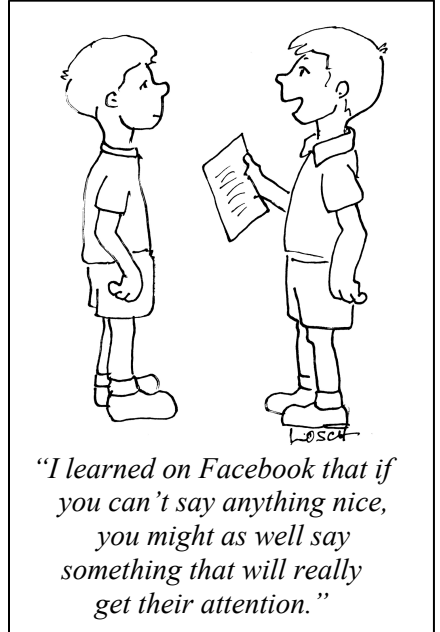
A Touch of Trivia

France has claimed for centuries that it produces the world's finest wines. On May 24, 1976, a British wine-seller, hoping to boost his business in French wines, sponsored "The Judgment of Paris." Nine French wine-tasting experts did a double-blind taste test of fine wines from around the world. All who were involved were certain of a French victory. The clear winners were a chardonnay and a cabernet sauvignon from the Napa Valley in California. A bottle of each is now in the Smithsonian.

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JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



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