

An Eternal Victory

Friends in Christ,

Many of us have been blessed to see a lot of Easters. Maybe you were in church every Easter since you were born. You know what it's like. The sun is shining. The children are smiling. The breakfast was great. Everybody is happy. For months you've been thinking about Easter lilies, dresses, egg hunts, and special meals.

But this Easter is different. We have the music, we have flowers and decorations; but it doesn't feel like Easter. No children running around in new clothes; no crying babies sitting next to their grandparents. Outside it may look like spring, but inside the church, it looks like winter.

Easter might not have been in your thoughts at all this year. You might even be saying, "When is Easter? Oh, is that today?" You have likely been preoccupied with something else.

Now, I imagine you're looking for a break; but let's take a few minutes to talk about that "something else." We don't talk about it so that we get depressed or scared. No, we talk about this "something else," in fact, we talk about how sad and scared we are of this "something else," so we can appreciate what we are celebrating this morning. When we recognize how sad our lives can be, then we can be filled with the full joy that Easter gives.

What is this "something else" that is so scary? It is not just the coronavirus, and all the things we have been doing to avoid it. And it is not only the Covid-19 illness that can be so painful and tragic—some of our members apparently got it, though there aren't enough tests to know for sure—the thought of labored breathing and recurring fever can be terrifying.

No, the "something else" that really weighs us down is the prospect of the end of breathing, the stopping of the heart; it is death. Death is something we don't want to think about. It is too sad. It is too scary. But it is out there—young and old, healthy and weak, we all face the prospect of death some time in our future.

What are we going to do about death? We can, and should, do all we can to avoid this virus—and we can thank the Lord if we have to this point been spared. All our lives we should take care of our bodies, eat right and exercise and avoid stress. By doing that we may delay death.

But there are no guarantees. There are so many ways our lives might end. Social distancing is not going to protect us forever. Death is still in our future.

But then we look at Easter. We listen to the wonderful, amazing promises God makes in the Bible. In our Lesson from 1 Corinthians, God promises that because Jesus was victorious over death, we have victory over death. In Jesus, we have An Eternal Victory.

What makes death so scary? In our Lesson Paul mentions "**the sting of death.**" But he's not talking about the prospect of suffering. Paul says, "**The sting of death is sin.**" Death is scary because of the reason we die.

If death were merely the end of one's existence, if we simply stopped being, it would be sad because we wouldn't be with our loved ones; it would be disappointing because we didn't

make it to 100 or whatever milestone; but that would simply be the end. Nothing scary afterwards.

The real reason death is scary is that we know that when we die, we will face our Judge. There is someone we need to give an account to. And our consciences tell us we haven't lived up to his expectations. **“The sting of death is sin. And the power of sin is the law.”** When we start to think, “I'm a pretty good person,” reading the Bible tells us that we are not good people. God's law says we are farther away from God's expectations than we thought. We deserve to be condemned.

But this is why Easter is so wonderful. Easter resets the courtroom for us. Listen to what Paul says: **“The sting of death is sin....But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

You heard what the angel said to those women who came to Jesus' tomb: “Do not be afraid.” He said that in a cemetery, in a cave that was a tomb, because on Easter, Jesus was victorious over death—and all the reasons for death.

When Jesus died on the cross, he took all the punishment for our sins. Now Jesus says, “You don't need to be afraid to die. Everything you did that would condemn you has been forgiven. When you face your Creator, he will welcome you with open arms.” Paul says, **“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”** Your sins have been forgiven, so the sting of death has been destroyed.

Believe in Jesus, and there is nothing to be afraid of, not even when we think about death.

In fact, the opposite is true. Because Jesus paid for our sins, death is just another part of the plan as God leads us to that perfect world he has in store for his followers. When we die, our bodies will be placed in the ground, but our souls go to be with God.

And a day is coming when this world will end, and as Paul says, **“we will all be changed—in a flash, in a twinkling of an eye...For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”**

You see, Jesus did not simply win a figurative victory. We will not simply live spiritually. We do not only “live on in the memories of our loved ones” or “in the legacy we leave behind.” We will be physically raised from the grave, to enjoy a glorified physical life for eternity.

On Easter, it wasn't just that Jesus' tomb was empty. You heard what the women found as they ran from the tomb. **“Suddenly Jesus met them.”** Jesus talked with them. They grabbed hold of his feet. For he had physically risen from the dead.

And so will we. Paul says that at the resurrection, **“The perishable [will be] clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”** These weak, perishable, mortal bodies will be raised back to life. But this time, we will be immortal. In fact, the Bible says we will never again be weak or injured or sick. We will live in a perfect, glorious world forever.

“When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’” We have an eternal victory.

After the resurrection of the dead, there will be no more viruses. There will be nothing to worry about.

There will be no quarantines. We will be together with all the people who believed in God, from all ages. The Bible pictures us as sitting together at a feast, not six feet apart, not wearing masks, all God's people rubbing elbows together.

And that won't be a strain on us. Right now, some families are going stir-crazy stuck together in a house—you can only watch TV for so long to distract you from issues. But in heaven we will all enjoy one another's company, in perfect love and caring.

In heaven there also won't be any loneliness. Some people have commented how much their families have been brought together by the current restrictions—when you're not running kids to soccer and basketball and music and everything else, when many grown-ups aren't away working late, they are finding that being together has allowed them to get to know one another. People are calling up friends and they have the time for a long talk. I think some of us may have been living disconnected from others, not recognizing how alone we had become. In heaven, we will have all the time we want to get to know others. Paul wrote the Corinthians that **“We will know fully even as we are fully known.”** In heaven, we won't feel alone.

In heaven, we won't be overworked. Think of the nurses and doctors and so many other people putting themselves out, working extra hard to protect and serve us. Farmers, laborers and so many others go through times where they are working long, back-breaking days in their regular jobs. In heaven we will work, but not to the point of exhaustion; we will enjoy everything we do.

And after the resurrection, there will be no uncertainty about our future. No wondering what the rules will be next month or next year for school or work or shopping. No worries about our jobs or our retirement. We will have no fears.

What is the best possible victory that we could talk about this morning? Getting your job back? Waking up with no worries about this virus? A victory over disease? All those would be wonderful; but none of them would last. And none of them will help you in eternity.

But the victory Jesus won when he left his tomb, the victory we will fully enjoy when he raises our bodies to life, the victory that is already ours by faith in him—that is a victory that will last forever.

In Jesus we have an eternal victory. Amen.