

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Indianapolis, IN
June 10, 2007

Death to Life

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for the sermon this morning is the Gospel which was read earlier.

Two large processions are slowly moving toward each other. The one was the parade of life as Jesus walked into the city. The Master, who taught both by His marvelous, life-giving words and by His amazing, life-sustaining deeds, led a large throng along the way. His disciples walked with Him, for that is what disciples do. He was also accompanied by a great crowd of people. At the gate of the city there was joy, life, and excitement in this royal procession for Jesus had, just the day before, healed a centurion's servant. Prior to that a leper had been cleansed at Jesus' Word. A paralytic rose up and walked, having been both healed and forgiven by the Son of God. Jesus had demonstrated the power and authority of His own divine nature when He cast out demons on one occasion and helped bring in a full net of fish on another. The other procession, the parade of death, has at its head the coffin of a "dead person," the only son of his widowed mother, who followed with a crowd of fellow townspeople.

An important event was about to take place. Two processions met at the gate of the town. In those days the towns were often surrounded by a wall, and people had to go in and out through a large gate. Was it by accident that the two processions happened to meet at this place and at this time? Jesus knew that this meeting would take place just this way.

Don't you wish that would happen to you when you are on the way to the cemetery to bury your loved one? Where is Christ then, when you so desperately need Him? Why doesn't He do as He did here, suddenly appear, halt the funeral procession, command the funeral director to open the hearse and bring your loved one's coffin forth so that He might speak the reviving words: "*I say to you, arise.*"

At that moment, the boy was called from death to life. At that moment, the boy had new life in the name of Christ. We too, have been called from death to life, just as my niece was earlier this morning by the waters of Holy Baptism. We who were spiritually dead have been called to new life in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, when the water, combined with the Word of God touched our forehead.

Shortly after creation, Adam and Eve sinned, and in turn, we sinned. We became children of Satan, eternally separated from God. It could be very easy to stop the story right there and say, "Woe is me." But the story doesn't end there. What Jesus tells the weeping woman He tells us as well: "*Do not weep.*"

We remain children of Satan until we are called by the waters of Holy Baptism to become children of God. We are strengthened as children of God by His Word and His Sacraments. The Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel, enlightened us with His gifts and sanctified and kept us in the true faith.

Jesus' words, "*Do not weep*" seem to be strange to whoever hears them, for there was no more appropriate time for weeping than at the time of death. Jesus' words imply that there is no cause for grieving, for the young man will yet live. These are strange words to our ears, as well. It is only natural that we mourn the loss of a loved one when

they pass away. Now, Jesus is telling the woman not to mourn. But the reason why she should not mourn is because Jesus is going to raise her son.

At that moment, the funeral procession stopped and Jesus touched the coffin “*and the dead man sat up and began to speak.*” The joy of all this is that what happened here is not a single isolated event but the glad pledge and promise of things to come. St. Paul writes, “*But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*” Remember that famous self-designation of Jesus, “*I am the resurrection and the life.*” Notice, He does not call Himself the “resurrector,” but the “resurrection.” In Him, in His Easter conquest of the coffin and triumph over the tomb, the resurrection of all men has already begun. And what God begins, God finishes.

The people are so amazed by what Jesus has just done that “*fear seized them all, and they glorified God.*” The miracle of Christ had the effect upon these people that they were filled with awe and reverence. They cried out that “*God has visited his people!*” Indeed, God has visited His people through His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He visited His people when He came in the form of a baby. He visited His people when He grew up, only to die for you and for me. He visited His people when He rose again and joined our Father in heaven to prepare a place for you.

The visit was redemptive. He comes to bear the burden of a cross to the little lonely hill of Golgotha; there to die that God might blot our offenses from His sign and mind forever. Christ visits Calvary and God does not visit us for our sins. For three days, He visits a garden grave and then bursts the bonds of death by His Easter rising. And now we are but temporary visitors in the prison of the tomb. For His is coming for a final visit, to free and liberate us from our shut and sealed coffins, to give us new and

immortal bodies and to take us to God's presence and a new world where all sorrow and sighing will have departed forever.

It is no wonder that fear - proper, Godly fear, came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people." And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region. The Parade of Death stopped that day. For there was absolutely no more reason for it to continue. The son is risen; risen indeed. Death was defeated and stopped dead in its tracks. "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?"

Christ's death and resurrection opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. It opened the kingdom for the widow's son who was dead. It opened the kingdom for Adam and Eve and it opened the kingdom for you and I.

On the Last Day, the Lord's Word will touch this coffin known as Earth and the dead in Christ will rise with body and soul then re-united. Hear that Word of the Lord: "I say to you arise." For the Lord God Almighty, the One Who created you in the first place, will, on the great and wonderful Day of the Resurrection, raise up the bodies of all and reunite them with their souls. There is no reason for us to weep, because our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, has given to us forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. In Jesus' name, amen.

Now the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in true faith until life everlasting. Amen.