

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL
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Worship Series: Victorious

Service Theme: Life Marches Victorious Over Death

Sermon Theme: Easter Changes Everything (April 17, 2022)
1 Corinthians 15:51-57

Can you imagine how they must have felt? 36 hours earlier, they had watched in inconsolable grief as their Lord, their teacher had been executed in the vilest manner possible. They had sadly observed as his body, which had once raised others to life, was placed lifeless in a tomb. They went home to prepare spices and perfumes so they could give his body a proper burial—the least and last thing they could do for someone who had done so much for them. And after spending an undoubtedly restless day of Sabbath rest wondering, weeping, and waiting, they set off for the tomb in the Sunday morning darkness.

Can you imagine how they must have felt? Their overwhelming sadness over the shocking death of someone they loved. Their fear and uncertainty about what the future now held. Their helplessness and hopelessness that anything they did would make a difference. As they made their way to Jesus' tomb, they were weighed down by more than the spices and perfumes they carried.

Really, we don't have to imagine what they must have felt. Because we've been there. Not walking to the tomb of our Lord, but maybe you know the shoulder-shaking grief of walking to the gravestone, or up to the casket of your spouse, parent, or child. Maybe you know the suffocating grip of fear and uncertainty as you ride in an ambulance with your loved one—or lie in a hospital bed yourself. Maybe you've felt completely drained by hopelessness and helplessness that anything you do will make a difference as you battle addiction or mental illness. You don't have to imagine what they must have felt—because you've felt it too.

But for those women, everything changed in an instant when they arrived at the tomb. It was open, and empty! And while their minds and hearts raced trying to figure out what had happened, suddenly ***“two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them...and said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, “The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.”***

Suddenly, all the fears and feelings that made them feel like they were carrying cement instead of spices...were changed! Because the tomb was empty! Because Jesus had risen! That first Easter Sunday changed everything for them! And my friends, if you've come this Easter Sunday morning, feeling the weight of your fears and failures; your sadness and struggles; your weaknesses and hopelessness, then take heart. The empty tomb changes all of them. **Easter Changes Everything!**

That's true both in the “right now,” and in the “not yet” because of one incredible truth. As the Apostle Paul writes to the Christians in the Greek city of Corinth, through Jesus, ***“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”***

Quite a claim, right? Because from the day Adam and Eve unleashed it into the world through their sin, death has been the great swallower of people. The conqueror of the greatest conquerors, kings, and kingdoms. The thief that will eventually rob everyone of their earthly possessions. The one inevitability of this life. And it's not like death has been held in check for the last 2 millennia since the first Easter. Over the last 2 years—between a global pandemic, mass shootings, and the war in Ukraine-- we've received seemingly constant reminders of our mortality.

So how can Paul say that death has been swallowed up in victory? Because although physical death is still a reality of life in this sinful world, Christ's victory over death on Easter has removed any reasons for us to fear it. Like a rattlesnake without fangs, or a scorpion without

its tail, the poison of death has been removed, swallowed up in victory!

Paul explains, “***The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.***” Death’s power to destroy—its sting, its venom-- is sin. As Paul writes in Romans, “***The wages of sin is death.***” Death came alive when Adam and Eve rebelled against God and brought sin into the perfect world. God created his people to live forever in perfection. But the consequences of their sin was death—both physical and eternal death. And so, as long as we remain sinners, death is a venomous snake, waiting to sink its fangs into us and send its eternally destructive poison into our bloodstream.

And as Paul says, the power of sin, that which makes its sting so deadly, is the law. If there was no law, if God hadn’t laid out a clear definition of right and wrong, there would be no such thing as sin. And if there was no sin, then there would be no death. But...God gave us the law. And therefore, our failure to keep it is sin. And therefore...the venom of sin produces death.

And that helps us understand ourselves. Death isn’t some unavoidable force because we just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Death is unavoidable because we’re sinners! Because we’ve willingly injected the deadly poison of sin into ourselves. That means, we can’t point the finger of blame for death at anyone but ourselves! Because we’re sinners, we will die.

But that sure doesn’t stop people from trying to prevent death! From diet and exercise, medical treatments—and all the way up to extremes, like cryogenic freezing, where they freeze your head after you die, so that when science figures out how to make humans immortal, they can thaw you out, and allow you to live forever. People are constantly looking for ways to not die.

Although those things might help you to live a little longer, none of them can prevent you from dying. No matter what religious leader, philosopher, or talking head you follow and model your life after, none

of them can prevent you from dying. Know why? Because they’re all dead, or will die too! Every solution for death is temporary.

Except one. There is only one person who can save us from death, because there is only one who swallowed up death in victory! As Paul writes, “***Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***” Jesus has won the victory over death, because he’s conquered the sting and the power of death. As Hebrews says, “***[Jesus] was tempted in every way just as we are—yet was without sin.***” He subdued the power of the law by keeping the law perfectly. He’s the antidote to the deadly venom of sin, because he alone was without sin! Therefore, by living a perfect life, and by suffering the punishment for our sins on the cross on Good Friday, Jesus has won total victory over death.

Jesus’ resurrection on Easter is the assurance that he meant what he said from the cross on Good Friday, “***It is finished.***” The perfect life God requires, and the punishment of death and hell that we deserve for our sins has been accomplished, finished in the work of Christ. So Easter changes the way we see our guilt, sin, and shame!

Easter also changes the way we think about death! A rattlesnake might seem intimidating and scary. You might scream or run if it lunged at you. But if its fangs have been removed, how can it harm you? Gum you to death? Likewise, death might still seem intimidating and scary. We might still scream or try to run when it lunges at us. But Jesus has removed its sting and its power! That means for all who trust in Jesus as their Savior, there’s no reason to fear death, because death has been swallowed up in victory!

In fact, since Jesus swallowed up death in victory, just like what you swallow up becomes a part of you, God has turned death into part of the victory! That which was once the most intimidating weapon against us, God now uses as a tool to bring about the ultimate victory for his people! Now, God uses death as the means to bring his people into eternal life. Easter changes death into the gateway to eternal life! And if Jesus conquered the one inevitable, unavoidable thing in this

life, what else in this life would we possibly have to worry about? Easter changes everything!

Martin Luther once wrote, ***“I have no more fear of death than taking off an old garment, and casting it away to put on a new beautiful garment of immortality and incorruptibility—spun and woven by Christ’s victory.”*** I don’t know about you, but I’ve never been terrified to change out of my dirty, stinky clothes after mowing the lawn in the Florida summer to put on clean, fresh clothes. I look forward to it!

And what a garment believers in Christ will get to put on one day! A garment of immortality and incorruptibility, produced by Christ’s victory! Easter changes everything—including us! Paul writes, ***“We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”***

Jesus’ resurrection from the dead guarantees that one day, we too will rise! At Judgment Day, when Jesus returns, all the dead will be raised to life, just as Jesus rose in victory on Easter! But not like zombies, rotting corpses and skeletons walking around. We will all be changed! Even those who are still alive when Jesus returns will be changed. In Philippians Paul writes, on that day ***[Jesus] will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.***

So, Easter changes everything—including our physical bodies! But what exactly will it be like to have a glorious, glorified body like Jesus? It means our bodies will be made perfect—all of the bad stuff and decay that sin produces in our bodies will be gone! Just think of that! Perfectly glorified bodies set free from disease, deformity, and deficiency. Set free from pain, struggle, or weakness. Set free from addiction, depression, and temptation. Set free from the guilt of things we’ve done with our bodies, or the scars and shame over things that others have done to our bodies. Just perfect, glorified bodies—the way God intended them to be from Creation. A return to Eden that never ends, dies, or decays!

That often leads to the inevitable questions. How old will we be? What will we look like? Will babies who died stay babies, or look like adults? The answer is—it’s like holding other people’s babies.

Before you have kids, it’s fun to hold other people’s babies, right? It’s fun to think about what it might be like to have kids of your own someday. But ultimately, you can’t really know what it’s like until the doctor places your own child into your arms for the first time. You can’t really understand what it’s like until you experience it for yourself. And the same is true about what it will be like to have a glorified, immortal, imperishable body. You can’t know what it’s like until you experience it for yourselves. But it’s sure fun to think about, isn’t it? And we can look forward to experiencing it with eager anticipation, and confident expectation. Because death has been swallowed up in victory!

Can you imagine how they must have felt? Those women. On the day they closed their eyes for the last time on earth, and opened them to find the one they couldn’t find at the tomb on that first Easter Sunday because he wasn’t there? You won’t have to imagine what they must have felt. Because clinging in faith to Jesus, the one who swallowed up death in victory, you’ll know. You’ll know. Because Easter changes everything!