

He is risen, indeed! Hallelujah!

Easter Sunday Sunrise Service
April 24, 2011
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
Hecla, SD

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 ***Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***

Theme: JESUS LIVES! THE VICTORY'S WON!

- Our enemy
- Our Champion

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus, who have come early on this the first day of the week to hear that your Savior Jesus has risen from the dead! Peace to you in His name!

Victory! Victory is one of those English words that people happy. I've never heard of anyone being sad that they won! Victory means triumph. It means overcoming an opponent or obstacle and standing on top. We love to be victorious. And we love to talk about our victories. The greater the opponent, the greater the enemy, the sweeter victory is! A Super Bowl victory. Victory over cancer. Victory in a lawsuit. Victory in war.

On this Easter morning we hear of the greatest victory that has every taken place. What makes this victory so great is who this victory is over and who are the winners in this victory. As we consider the word of God in 1 Corinthians 15, let us use the words of that wonderful Easter hymn, ***"Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won!"*** May God help us to cherish and give thanks for the victory that Jesus accomplished.

OUR ENEMY

The greater the enemy, the greater the victory. And is there any greater enemy out there then the enemy we hear about in our text? Death makes every other opponent or enemy or obstacle that we may face in this world seem minuscule in comparison. At least with the opponents we face in this world we have a chance to win. But which one of us can defeat death? Sometimes we speak of "cheating death" or "delaying death," but never of someone overcoming death. As many strides as have been made in the medical community, our doctors have not been able to overcome death. You may be able to take pills to treat a disease that 100 years ago you would have died from, but those pills aren't going to stop death forever. You may be able to get botox shots, lipo-suction, and face-lifts to make you look younger on the outside, but death is not fooled by plastic surgery. Death is too great of a foe to overcome.

This great enemy stands lurking around every corner of our lives. And when it comes, it stings, doesn't it. It stings when a loved one dies. It causes us pain that is often hard to

express. But death does not just sting our hearts, death also stings our flesh. Our bodies are afraid of dying.

As I was visiting with Mable on Friday, we were talking about death and how our bodies don't look forward to dying. She replied that at 94 there are some things that only death will end for her. She talked about how she couldn't wait to be rid of the pains of this life and to be with her Lord forever in heaven. Yet I asked her that if she had the choice of dying tomorrow to be with her Savior or having her Savior return tomorrow for Judgment Day, which would she prefer. And without a moment's hesitation, she answered that she would much rather go right to heaven rather than dying. You see, even though the body may be worn down by age and disease, still the body shudders at the thought of death. That is death's sting. A sting that all of our bodies dread to feel.

What gives death its sting is sin. Paul writes in our text, ***"The sting of death is sin."*** The reason we fear bees and wasps is because of their painful sting. Do you think we'd be afraid of bees and wasps if they didn't sting? Sin is death's stinger. It is what makes us fear death. We are afraid of what is going to happen to us because of sin. Scripture declares, ***"The wages of sin is death."*** (Rom 6:23a) Death is the payment for sin. If sin didn't exist in our lives, that paycheck would never have to be cashed. If we did not sin, death would not be a part of our lives.

And what gives sin such power to sting, is the law of God. ***"The power of sin is the law,"*** Paul writes. In His law, our Creator tells us His will for us. And when we fail to do what He says He threatens to punish us. Punish us now with temporal sufferings and punish us eternally in hell for disobeying Him. Scripture again declares, ***"by the law is the knowledge of sin."*** (Rom 3:20b) The law of God shows us just how much we have sinned. It accuses and condemns us for failing to live up to God's standards. It testifies of the ways we've failed to honor our father and mother; the ways we've failed to speak well of our neighbor; the ways we've failed to live a chaste and decent life in word and deed. The law shows the countless times we've failed to obey God's will.

Lose a football game, and life will go on. Lose a war and life in your country may change, but life continues none the less. However, Scripture declares that if we STUMBLE in one point of the law, NOT FALL, but STUMBLE, get tripped up in doing what God wants us to do, we are guilty of all. It is as though we had broken every one of God's commandments. This loss truly affects us. It affects us now in this life and forever in eternity. This is where death gets its sting. Death is the enemy we cannot overcome, because we cannot overcome our sin.

OUR CHAMPION

Since we are talking about victories and athletics, let's talk a moment about a pinch hitter in baseball. A pinch hitter is a batter the manager sends into the game with hopes that he'll get a hit at a crucial point in the game, usually when the team is losing. Now that pinch hitter is not responsible for the fact that his team is losing, up to this point. He had not been the one striking out, pitching poorly, causing any errors or giving up any runs. But the moment he is sent to home plate, he has an opportunity to change the entire outcome of the game. With one swing of the bat, he can win the game for the entire team.

Jesus is like a pinch hitter, isn't He. We had struck out. We had dropped balls. We had caused countless errors. But God sent His Son into the game. And with His life, Jesus changed the entire outcome of our lives! That is what we see on Easter morning. We see our Champion Jesus, victoriously risen from the dead.

While we had failed miserably to live according to God's law in thought, word, and deed, Jesus obeyed it perfectly. Jesus loved the LORD God with all of His heart, all of His soul, and all of His mind. Scripture declares that Jesus **"became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."** (Phil 2:8b) When it was the Father's will for Jesus to drink the cup of His wrath by dying on the cross, Jesus went forth willingly. Did Jesus also keep the law by loving His neighbor as Himself? Isn't that exactly what His death on the cross shows us? Jesus loved us so much that He was willing to lay down His life to save us! While we struck out with the law, Jesus hit a home run!

In our Champion Jesus, we have one who stepped up to the plate for us. He took all our strike-outs and all our errors and took the blame for them. (God) **"made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** (2 Cor 5:21) He took our losses, our failures, all our sins, on Himself and suffered the wrath of God for our sin. Jesus took our sins and removed them from us as far as the East is from the West. Jesus took our sins and threw them into the depth of the sea, never to be seen again. Jesus took our sins on Himself, had them nailed to the cross with Him, there they died with Him, and were sealed with Him in the tomb. In Jesus, then, His home run of righteousness is a victory for us. Though we didn't hit the game winning home run, but Jesus did, the whole team still wins. We become the righteousness of God in Him.

Yet, there is still this one, dark, mighty enemy looming around every corner. Death. But Jesus was victorious over that too, wasn't He! Like little King David, standing victorious of the mighty slain giant, Goliath, on Easter we see Jesus standing victoriously over the giant that is death. Having been faithful to the law and never sinning, death had no power over Him. Death could not hold Him in the grave. Jesus did what no one has done or can do - He was faithful in every point of the law, He was tempted but never once sinned, and He overcame death by rising from it on the third day.

Jesus changed the whole game. The Paul writes in the last verse of our text, **"Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."** Did you hear that! God GIVES US the victory that Jesus won for us. His pinch hit home run means that we win. The law has been fulfilled in our place by Jesus, so sin is left powerless. And when Jesus died on the cross He fully atoned for our sins. That means the sting of death has been removed. Death now is like a bee or wasp that has had its stinger removed. There is still that annoying buzzing sound of death, but it cannot harm us in Christ. **"Death has been swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"**

Because Jesus lives we too shall live. His victory means our victory. Just as the grave could not hold Jesus, in Him death cannot hold us either. We too shall rise. On the Last Day when our Champion Jesus returns the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised, and in the twinkling of an eye, in a flash, both the living and dead believers will be changed. These perishable, mortal bodies, will be made imperishable and immortal. We shall be given heavenly bodies that will not change or decay over time. Imperishable and immortal bodies that will live on eternally with our Champion Jesus in heaven. We shall be with the Lord forever!

Victory! There are few words in the English language sweeter than this, especially when it means victory over death. Jesus lives! The victory is won! **"Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."** Hallelujah! Amen!