

John 8.42-59

*Judica* (5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent)

7 April 2019

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Iesu Iuva +

Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

On Wednesdays, as many of you know, we've been working on a sermon series on Christian suffering. Suffering for the good we do. Suffering for the evil we've done. Suffering under the assaults of the devil. Suffering when our loved ones are taken from us through death.

In a way, you could tack this Sunday onto that series.

Because today, Jesus Himself tackles death, the Last Enemy. And whether in this lifetime you suffer much or little, every single one of you will suffer death unless the Lord Jesus returns first.

And the first thing we learn about death is this: it isn't natural. It was never God's plan. In fact, it's the very opposite of God's plan. When God created, He created life. Full stop. When He created Adam and drew Eve from his side, death wasn't even a thing.

But enter the father of lies. And understand the demonic power of lies. Lies aren't just "not the truth." They're diametrically opposed to the truth. And in the hands of the father of lies, they are deadly.

The truth of the matter back then in Eden was that Eve could eat from any single tree in the Garden. Just not the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But the father of lies wishes to do nothing quite so much as destroy the truth and set up falsehood. And by the end of his brief conversation with Eve, he had led her from God's truth to his lie and she was taking a big juicy bite out of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And death followed.

Death followed...because from the beginning this father of lies has been a murderer. That's the power of his lies.

And now death has such a hold on the world and on us that there's no one who lives but that won't also die. There's no one who'll run a marathon and be a champion sprinter who won't be immobilized on his death bed. There's no mother who will give life to another at the hospital but won't also breathe her last in the same hospital. And even you—you who today sit in these pews—even you someday will enter this nave not on your own power, but in a box, and carried by six men.

But that's to look at death from after death. That's not the hard part.

The hard part is the dying. The hard part is not knowing the how—and what it *could* be like. We've all seen people die. It's not pleasant. The hard part is knowing it's imminent. And the uncertainty about it all—what the last breath will feel like? And then what? Who's lived through death to tell anyone what it's like? No one.

And it's right there that your world is shaken to its core. For everything you were is no more. Those you loved. Left behind. The plans you had. Dashed. The hopes you had. Gone.

And then the unimaginable happens: the creature that was created with life only...dies. And to every appearance nothing is certain anymore. Not health. Not breath. Not even life. And God? God seems distant. Even a figment of the imagination. For if there is a God, He must be a God of life, not of death. But here I see nothing but death.

This is the suffering that every single one of you, I can guarantee it, will have. And as we've talked about suffering opening up the gulf between hope and reality and placing you right in the middle of it, that gulf is widest right then and there: where life must yield to death. And where, if Satan had his way, your hope would yield to utter despair. Despair over yourself. And even worse, despair of God.

But it's into the middle of that gulf that Christ our dear Lord speaks. And this is what He says, "If anyone keeps My Word, he shall not taste death."

Now listen. Death. The death that Satan brought into the world, it was an eternal death. It started at the moment you breathed out your last and it endured for eternity.

That's the death Satan's lies brought. That's what Satanic death is. An eternal negation of life. An eternal destruction of life. An eternal separation of living creature from living God. The eternal consequence of sin.

But now in Christ God has turned the tables. In Christ He has negated the negation of life. In Christ He has interrupted and halted the eternal destruction of life. In Christ He has forever repaired the separation of living creature from living God. Because in Christ He has done away with sin.

And now those who are in Christ freely call death nothing but a sleep. They freely believe and confess that they sleep more soundly in their own beds than they do in their grave because even if they can't be shaken awake in bed, at nothing more than the voice of their Good Shepherd on the Last Day they will rise up from the grave. And as death swings its scorpion tail they freely mock it and say with Isaiah and Paul, "O death, where is your sting?"

That's because death's stinger is sin; and Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world. His holy nativity. His holy and blameless life before God and men. His holy and innocent suffering. His sacred death. His glorious resurrection. His blessed ascension. His mighty session at the Father's right hand—through that you have the forgiveness of sins. They are gone. Death's stringer is removed. And your last breath is nothing more than a dozing off, to be awakened in eternal life. Because, don't you see, through His resurrection, even death itself is broken. Satan's plan entirely in shambles.

And all of that—every last bit of what Jesus has done for you by His birth, life, cross and grave—Jesus puts right into His Word, so that to say, "I have Christ's Word," is to say, "I have Christ." And if you have Christ, then you have this One who has overcome devil, sin and death for you. And you shall not taste death, because whatever it was that Satan had made it, it's that no more.

That's the power of Christ's word.

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And it's that powerful word that Abraham believed, and here you can see the demonstration of its power.

There he stood atop Mt. Moriah. Knife in hand. The command to sacrifice his son, his *only* son. And Isaac there, his son, his *only* son, with the wood already strapped to his back, ready to be offered up.

It's hard to imagine that Abraham had any other feeling at that moment than sorrow. To think he was anything but terror-stricken.

But that's not what Jesus says. He says Abraham rejoiced. The very opposite of sorrow and terror.

For Abraham, too, knew that in virtue of the Christ who was to come death had already been destroyed. Even Isaac's. He knew that the last breath his Isaac would draw was just a dozing off to sleep. He knew that Isaac, too, would rise on the Last Day to everlasting life.

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What a thing that is, that something so horrific should become so defanged. That something so dreadful should become a thing of rejoicing. That something so final should be reversed.

And it's all done through a word—a word that you do well to hold fast in a true faith: your sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. For—you know this—where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also ... life and salvation.

God grant you all such faith for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

*pax dei, etc.*

jsb  
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