

THE VICTORY IS OURS!

Easter

March 31, 2024

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Old Testament Lesson; Isaiah 12:1-6

Gospel Lesson; John 20:1-18

Sermon Text; 1 Corinthians 15:51-57

The sermon text we will look at for this Easter Sunday is taken from 1 Corinthians, chapter fifteen, *The Great Resurrection Chapter*, verses fifty-one through fifty-seven.

Look I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. But once this perishable body has put on imperishability, and this mortal body has put on immortality, then what is written will be fulfilled: Death is swallowed up in victory.

Death, where is your sting?

Grave, where is your victory?

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!

These are Your words, Heavenly Father. Lead us in the way of truth. Your Word is truth.

Amen

I wish all of you could have met my grandma, Susie Bartels. I am pretty sure you would have really liked Susie Bartels. Let me tell you a little bit about her. She did not have more than a high school education. She was really quite poor. She lived in a tiny, little house in a tiny, little town called Tecumseh, Nebraska. It was a little farming community. She did not have very much to her name. She had a wonderful personality. She was humble. She was kind of quiet. But, she had this really enduring way of making you feel like you really meant something to her. Even just the way she would say your name had this enduring quality about it. She had a smile almost all of the time. Her smile kind of said, *“Contentment and wisdom”* all at once. I just loved my grandma, Susie Bartels! She wore her hair pulled back. It was gray streaked hair that was pulled back in a bun. And, she almost always had on an apron that had little, tiny flowers on it. I loved her. I wish you could have met her.

On July 22nd in 1974 the phone rang at our house. My dad answered, and immediately I knew what happened. I knew my grandma, Susie Bartels had died. My heart started to hurt, and I got really sad. I knew this was going to be the first time that I was old enough to go to a funeral for somebody that I really loved very dearly. That had never happened to me before. I thought, *“This is going to be awkward going to a funeral. I am not going to know what to say. Everybody is going to be really sad.”*

As I was thinking about that, I was thinking, *“If you know my dad, who was on the phone, I know what he was thinking. I bet he is already thinking about what hymns to sing at Grandma's funeral.”* Sure enough, when he hung up the phone he said, *“Well, Grandma died.”*

Then, the next thing he said was, *“I would love to sing...”*, (and then he announced the hymn), *“at my mom's funeral”*.

When he told me the title of the hymn, it took me back. I stepped back, and thought to myself (*I did not say it out loud*), I thought to myself, “*Dad, what are you thinking?*”

He said, “*I would love to sing at my mom's funeral, **I Know That My Redeemer Lives.***”

The thought that went through my teenage brain was, “*That is an Easter Hymn. It is summer time. It is not Easter. Why would we sing an Easter hymn at Grandma's funeral?*”

The second thought that went through my head was, “*That is a happy hymn. Funerals are a sad day. Why would we sing a hymn of joyful defiance?*”

Then, all of a sudden, it hit me. Jesus' resurrection! ***I Know That My Redeemer Lives*** is a hymn of joyful defiance in the face of death. And, what better hymn could you sing at the funeral of a Christian you loved so dearly, than a hymn of joyful defiance in the face of death? For the first time in my life, it really, really hit me how critical Jesus' resurrection is to us, as His people, as His believers.

I want to walk through, using the today's text, why the resurrection is so critical to us, and why it gives us the absolute ability to face death with absolute joyful defiance.

What I did not tell you, when I was talking about my grandma, I did not tell you her cause of death.

Here at Holy Cross, we have old church records that go way back 1926. You can open up these old church record books, and see that in the early days the pastors actually used to write down when somebody died, the date they died, the date of their funeral, and then they would write behind that ***The Cause of Death***. So, you could read through that book, and you would see all different causes of death. You would see stroke, heart attack, old age, cancer.

Here is what my grandma's cause of death was. My grandma got stung. Grandma Suzie Bartels was stung, and the thing that stung

her was so fatal that as soon as she got stung, it was too late. There was nothing that could reverse it. There was nothing that could undo it. As soon as she got stung, everybody knew, *“This is it. She is going to die.”*

I bet you are wondering what stung her? It was not a spider. It was not a scorpion. It was not a bee. It was what our scripture reading is talking about.

Here is what it says.

“The sting of death is sin...”

My grandma, Suzie Bartels, was a sinner. She got stung. She got stung by sin. And then, it was too late. Once you are stung by sin, it is too late, and you can't stop what is going to happen. My grandma was stung by sin way, way, way back. The Bible says,

**“I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”**

So, from the moment she came into existence, my grandma was stung. She was going to die. That is what The Law says about all of us. God told Adam and Eve,

**“The day you eat of the fruit
you will surely die.”**

They did. They ate of the fruit, and then what did God say?

**“...for dust thou art,
and unto dust shalt thou return.”**

They got stung, and then what comes next is death. That is the result. The Bible says,

**“Sin entered the world through one man
and death through sin.**

**All die,
because all sin.”**

So, my grandma got stung by sin, and **“The sting of death is sin”**. That was her cause of death.

God loves us so dearly that He, in His great mercy, wanted to rescue

us from sin, and its result, which is death.

I am going to give you two 'pictures' about why Jesus, and His resurrection are so absolutely critical to us.

The first one I am going to take you to is what happened on Good Friday. Now, a lot of you older people have probably heard this illustration. But, if you are a young person, you may have never heard this one. When I was a kid, this one really hit me. So, this is particularly for you young kids here.

Imagine there is a dad driving his car. In the car are his kids. So, it is a dad and his kids.

All of a sudden, there is this bee flying around in the car, buzzing and buzzing. The kids are starting to scream, and they are scared the bee is going to sting them.

As Dad is driving the car, he reaches up, grabs the bee in mid air, and holds it in his hand.

So, the kids kind of calm down, because they think, *“Dad's got the bee.”*

Dad keeps driving, and after a little while, he opens his hand, and the bee flies out, again. When his kids start screaming again, the dad says to them, *“Calm down. Look at my hand.”*

In his hand is the bee's stinger. The dad says to the kids, *“Here is his stinger. He can't hurt you anymore. He can scare you, but he can't hurt you anymore.”*

That is what happened on Good Friday. The Bible says, **“The sting of death is”** what? It is **“sin”**. On Good Friday Jesus took the sting. Jesus took your sin. **Jesus took your sins.**

The Bible says,

“The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity (or the sin) of us all.”

The Bible says that when Jesus was nailed to the cross,

“Our sins were nailed there with Him.”

It was like He got stung. He got stung by the sins of all people from all times. Talk about a massive sting. He became Peter, the denier.

He became Paul, the blasphemer. He became David the murderer and adulterer. He became all of us sinners, and He got stung.

“The sting of death is sin...”

What happens when you are a sinner? Well, you die. So, Jesus became mortal. By taking our sin He became mortal.

Now, I want to tell you what happened next. I am going to use a 'picture' from Martin Luther. (*I am going to change it a little bit.*)

This is not my idea. It comes from Martin Luther.

He said, “Death is like this big, giant, predator fish. It is swimming around, and it is looking for sinners. It says, 'If you have sinned, I am going to get you.’”

“As it was swimming around, it saw the biggest sinner of all. It saw Jesus, hanging on the cross, and thought, 'I am going to get you, and I am going to swallow you up.’”

“And, that is what happened. Death swam right up to the biggest sinner, the One who deserved to die, because He took all of our sin. Death opened its mouth, and it swallowed Jesus. It closed its mouth, and the stone was rolled in front of the tomb. Death had gotten its biggest victim, yet.”

But then, Luther says this. “Then, death had taken the bait! It had taken the bait, and it didn't know what it had just swallowed.”

Luther says “Jesus was like a worm on a hook. The humanity of Christ was like that worm on the hook.”

Jesus in The Old Testament described His crucifixion,

**“But I am a worm
and not a man...”**

So, death sees this weak, powerless One who has the sins of the whole world on Him. Death sees that worm on the hook, grabs it, and gobbles it up.

But what death did not see was the hook that was under the worm.

What was the hook? The hook was the Deity of Christ, the Divinity. Death had just swallowed God. God is holy. God is perfect. God is

sinless. And the hook was set, and now death had something in its belly that should not be there. Death had the holy, sinless One who had never sinned. Death had the One in its stomach who yes, had gone to the cross to pay for sin, but that sin was gone. It was removed. It was washed away. God, the Father, accepted the full payment for sin, and sin was gone. And now, in death's stomach was the One who should not be there.

And finally, after three days, Jesus said, *“This is enough”*, and burst a hole right through the belly of death. Jesus, the One who has victory over sin, the holy One, burst a hole right through the belly of death. He rose from the dead.

Now, I want to take you back to my grandma, Suzie Bartels. My grandma, Suzie Bartels, was a sinner. She knew that. And, she was also a saint. *‘A saint’* means *‘holy one’*. My grandma, Suzie Bartels used to go to St. John's Lutheran Church in Tecumseh, Nebraska, every Sunday. There she would confess her sins. She would have delivered to her what Jesus won on the cross. Through The Word, through Sacraments, through Absolution, through the preached sermon she would hear, she would be given the forgiveness of sins that Christ won for her. She knew, she knew in God's eyes, for Christ's sake, she was justified. That means God looked at her, and said, *“I don't see any sin in you. I do not see any sin in you, and you are forgiven.”*

So, on July 22, 1974 when death swallowed up my grandma, she was mortal. She was a sinner. But, I am going to tell you something. Death swallowed somebody that really should not be there, because she is holy. In God's eyes she is holy. She has been declared holy, for Christ's sake. And so, death can't hold her. It cannot hold her. And, as surely as Jesus walked out of that tomb, burst a hole in that great fish's stomach, someday my grandma will come out of the grave. She has been made holy by Christ, and declared holy. She is going to walk out of the grave. Death cannot

hold on to people who are holy in God's eyes.

Which is why our text says what it says:

“Listen. Listen, I tell you a mystery. 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, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable body must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable body has clothed itself with imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true.

Death, death has been swallowed up in victory.

Where oh death is your sting?

Where oh grave is your victory?

**The sting of death is sin,
and the power of sin is the Law.**

**But thanks be to God,
who gives us He gives us the victory
through our Lord Jesus Christ!”**

No wonder my dad wanted to sing a joyfully defiant hymn at my grandma's funeral.

Earlier in this sermon I started out by saying, *“I wish you could have met my grandma, Suzie Bartels.”*

If you are a Christian, you are going to meet her someday. You are going to meet her someday! You are going to meet my grandma, with her risen body made immortal. I will be there, too. And, if you are a Christian, you will be, too. One day, in Heaven, you will run across me. I will have my arm around Suzie Bartels, and she will have her arm around me. I will see you, and I will say, *“Hey, do you remember when I told you about my grandma Bartels, way back in 2024? Here she is.”*

You will get to meet her, and I will get to meet all of your loved ones in Christ, who have died, and someday are going to rise from

the dead, because of what Christ has done for us on Good Friday, and Easter Sunday.

I am going to read the verse that comes after our text in closing.

So, knowing all of this it says,

**“Therefore my dear brothers and sisters,
be steadfast, immovable,**

(In other words, as you go through life, no matter what comes, no matter what troubles, no matter what trials, no matter what people might say, or do to you, it says,)

**“Therefore my dear brothers and sisters,
be steadfast, immovable,**

always excelling in the Lord's Word,

because you know, you know your labor in the Lord is not in vain, because the victory is ours.”

Amen

Now, may the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep our hearts, and our minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Amen