

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Easter Song Service  
April 1, 2018  
Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran  
**Nonperishables**  
—1 Corinthians 15:51-57

Nearly everything has a shelf life. Have you ever found that container that's fallen to the back of the fridge? It's been sitting there undisturbed for well over a month. You open the lid. Its contents are unrecognizable. Something awful has grown on it. You plug your nose and you contemplate: "Do I dare wash this wretched thing, or do I throw it away." The contents of that container are perishable. Or what about that cup of yogurt you left in your lunch box, and your lunchbox that you left in your car for three days, in July, in Arizona. The only reason you discover it is because it broke open and filled your car with a rancid, sour stench. That yogurt is perishable. Ironically, even foods labeled as "non-perishable" have an expiration date. Everything has a shelf life, including you. You have an expiration date. In some cases a person may even be given an estimated expiration date. That's a sobering thought. It's a hard reality to swallow.

It was a hard reality that Jesus' friends and family to swallow. It was a devastating reality for Peter who once said of Jesus' death, "Never Lord!" It was the harsh reality that his own mother had to painfully endure as she watched her son and God's Son breathe his last breath. The Roman soldier who pierced his side with a spear, pronounced him dead. Not asleep, not in a coma. He was really dead. The Son of God expired.

When Jesus talked about his death it hardly seemed real, but in the hours following Jesus' death, the reality very quickly sank in. Mary and Martha perhaps looked at the empty bed where Jesus had slept a few nights earlier at their home in Bethany. "That's it, he's not coming back." As the disciples cowered behind locked doors, I'm sure the reality sank in... "He's not going to walk across the stormy sea to calm and comfort this time. That's it. He's gone." It really sank in for Mary Magdalene and the other women on their early-morning walk to the tomb as they brought spices and perfumes to mask death's awful stench. The reality of Jesus' death had sunk its teeth into the hearts of Jesus' companions. But there was another reality that trumped the first, and they were still tragically unaware of it.

Mary Magdalene was among the first to the tomb and She noticed something strange. There was an open tomb, but no stench. Peter peered inside the tomb. There were grave clothes but no corpse. There had been a death, but no decay. But there wasn't immediate rejoicing. It wasn't an automatic "ah ha" moment at the empty tomb. Strangely the reality of Jesus' resurrection would take a lot longer to sink in than the reality of his death.

None of you is surprised to hear that Jesus is risen from the dead, especially not today. But let that reality sink in. Like it was for Jesus' disciples and other companions, the reality of death and decay seems much more real than the resurrection reality. But the resurrection is a reality. Just as Jesus really died, he also really rose from the dead. He doesn't just live spiritually with his soul in heaven and his body still in the ground. He physically died, but he also physically rose from the dead. His heart actually stopped beating, his lungs expired their last breath of air; but now his heart beats once again to circulate his holy and precious blood through his sacred veins. His lungs again are filled with air as he really lives and really breathes.

The reality of the resurrection isn't just a reality for Jesus; it's a reality for you! There are three key realities proven and guaranteed by Jesus' resurrection that impact you. First: Jesus isn't a fraud, but he really is true God. He is who he said he was. Second: since he's not a fraud, your sins are really forgiven-

not partially, not pending certain conditions, but they really are forgiven because Jesus really rose from the dead. And the third key truth emphasis in this section of Corinthians 15: You too will physically be raised back to life on the Last Day.

The resurrection of the dead is a reality, but not one that comes naturally and easily to people. That's why Paul calls it a mystery—it's something that has to be revealed. ***“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, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”***

It was hard for Jesus' companions to grasp the reality of the resurrection. It can be hard for us too, even though this mystery has been graciously revealed to us. It's easy to lose sight of this resurrection reality because we now live in a perishable world and perishable bodies. We've seen many things fade and perish. If you've been around long enough, you've seen few things stand the test of time. Everything has a shelf life. And that reality should fix our eyes on things spiritual and things eternal. And yet the opposite happens. We lose sight of the resurrection reality. I am tempted to indulge in all the perishable things this world has to offer. If the only reality that we dwell on is that “nothing lasts forever, we're here today and gone tomorrow,” that's how we'll live. “Eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. I'll try to get my hands on what I can while I can. I'll try to find comfort and stability in tangible perishable stuff. I'll put off any thought about the end of life, and pay no attention to the elephant in the room. I'll just live for today.”

But that outlook on life is not sustainable. If we put our hope what is perishable, then hope itself will perish. And then when death inevitably comes, what comfort could I possibly have if I've lost sight of the resurrection reality? If we lose sight of the resurrection reality, then facing death is like facing a formidable enemy on the battlefield. That's the illustration Paul uses here. Death carries a lethal weapon, something like a spear. Death's weapon, or death's sting, is sin. Picture that: you have to face off against an enemy called death, and he comes armed with all your sins. He uses your own sin to slay you and cut you down on the battlefield. And if you underestimate sin's lethal power, remember the God's law. The very law you have repeatedly broken. For this reason people perish, both physically and eternally.

Don't lose sight of the resurrection reality. Don't put your hope in what is perishable, but in the nonperishable reality of Jesus and his resurrection. Thanks be to God that the perishable world and perishable bodies we now in habit is not the end all and be all. ***For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”***

Those are taunting words—trash talk against the enemy of death. “Death, you got nothing on me.” Jesus has disarmed death. He has taken away death's poisonous sting. ***The sting of death is sin.*** Jesus Christ has taken all your sins away. He has stripped death of its lethal sting. ***The power of sin is the law.*** Sin has lost its power to pierce and condemn you to death because Christ fulfilled God's law for you. Then he suffered the condemnation deserved for God's law. He stepped in front of death's lethal sting to save us. He was pierced for our transgressions. He really died. But even more, he really rose. Death has nothing on Jesus. Death could not keep him in the grave. And so death has nothing on you. It cannot keep you in the grave. For all who believe in Jesus and the reality of his resurrection, death is no longer a fierce enemy with a deadly weapon. It's completely unarmed. It doesn't even have a stick to shake at you. It cannot fling a single of your deadly sins back at you because Christ has taken them away. Death is out of ammo.

Death may still be a hard reality to swallow, but remember death itself will be swallowed up in victory. This isn't just a euphemism to gloss over death, and to make the reality of death a little easier for us to swallow. But death really will be swallowed up, devoured, destroyed once and for all. Death will die

never to come back again. Jesus' resurrection is reality, and so is yours. As surely as you will physically die, you will also physically be raised from the dead. There will come a time when your heart will actually stop beating, your lungs will expire their last breath of air; but once again your heart will beat and circulate blood through your veins. Your lungs will again be filled with air and you will again really live and really breath, as surely as Jesus really lives and really breathes. This is really going to happen. It has to happen.

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