

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Festival of the Resurrection of our Lord
April 17, 2022
Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz
Jesus lives!

⁵¹Look, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵²in 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. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴But 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.

⁵⁵Death, where is your sting?

Grave, where is your victory?

⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

—1 Corinthians 15:51-57

Jesus lives! That's the whole point of the Christian faith: Jesus lives! The man who was nailed to a cross and put to death on Friday came back to life on the third day. Jesus promised that the resurrection would happen, and then he made it happen. He rose from the dead on that first Easter Sunday, just as he said he would. If Jesus didn't come back from the dead, then he was a liar and a fraud. The Bible says that Easter is the litmus test for whether the Christian religion has any merit or not. Earlier in this same chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians the Apostle Paul wrote, "If Christ has not been raised our preaching is useless, and so is your faith. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:14,17). But Christ has indeed been raised (1 Cor. 15:20)! We have the testimony of eyewitnesses to the living, resurrected Lord Jesus, men and women who at first were bewildered and confused about what they were seeing, and then were emboldened to testify and even give their lives because they had seen the risen Christ. The Holy Spirit has worked faith in our hearts to trust that Jesus has risen from the dead. We have placed our hope in him, confident that Jesus lives!

Let's celebrate what that means: Jesus lives! It means that Jesus of Nazareth really is God in the flesh, just as he claimed to be. He said he would lay down his life and take it up again, and he did just that. When Jesus rises from the dead, he proves that he is no mere mortal, no ordinary human being. This is the Christ, the Son of the living God. This is God who came down from heaven, who has power over illness and disease, over wind and wave, and most importantly power over death. Through the Spirit of holiness he was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 1). When Jesus was hanging on the cross his enemies taunted him. "Come down from the cross," they said, "if you are the Son of God." Jesus did not respond to them then because his work as the Son of God on the cross was not complete. But on the third day he showed exactly who he is. On the cross they taunted him; on Easter he showed them!

Jesus lives! That means the price for the sin of the world really has been paid. The blood that Jesus shed on the cross is the all-sufficient sacrificial payment for every sin. God the Father declared publicly his approval upon Jesus' completed work by raising his Son from the dead. On the cross Jesus cried out, "It is finished! Paid in full!" on Easter morning God showed the world that the payment was accepted. And if Jesus paid for the sin of the world, that means he must have paid for the sin of you and me, because we are part of the world for whom Jesus died. "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25). There is no doubt. There was nothing missed. Jesus did not die for everyone but skip a few. That means that your sins are forgiven, you have been reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

Jesus lives! He who once was dead now lives again. That means that Jesus has power over death. Death, the last enemy, the Grim Reaper, is the cold reality that awaits every mortal human being. People have all kinds of ideas about death, what it is and what it means. Some people blow it off; they don't want to think about the reality and their own mortality. Some people say with great bravado, "I'm not afraid to die!" And maybe they're not. Some people think everyone goes to a better place when they die; they don't. Some people think death is the end, and there is no afterlife; they're wrong. Most people, given the choice, would love to live forever in perfect health,

perfect strength, perfect happiness. Some people have a morbid fascination with death. Whatever the attitude people might have, there is only one person who can tell us what death is and what is to come. That person is Jesus, the Son of God who tasted death, yielded his spirit and three days later came back to life victorious over death.

Jesus lives! Jesus conquered death! Jesus has power over death! This reality completely changes the nature of our existence in this life, and it completely changes our purpose in life. Jesus, the Son of God who rose from the dead, who has power over death, will raise us from the dead. When we leave this life our soul will leave our body, and our soul will rest in Jesus to wait for the resurrection of all flesh. And on that day when Jesus returns to earth, all the dead will be raised, body and soul will be reunited, and we will be with the Lord forever. This is what the apostle is speaking of in our Scripture text today: *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. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.*

Every religion on the planet has some concept of an afterlife. Because Jesus lives we expect much more. We're not going to the Happy Hunting Ground or to the Elysian Fields or to spook around in the shadows or float around in the clouds. We confess in the Christian creed: We believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Jesus lives! Jesus rose from the dead, and he will raise us from the dead.

Jesus lives! That means today we celebrate the greatest victory that has ever been accomplished. Sin—paid for! Satan—defeated! Death—powerless against Jesus! All the enemies of God and all the enemies of our soul—vanquished by Jesus' resurrection. You've seen the celebration when a team wins the Super Bowl or is the last team standing in March Madness. The thrill of victory is unsurpassed! If that's the celebration that ensues from a trivial little earthly victory, imagine the celebration in heaven when Jesus triumphs in the ultimate victory. Heaven is not big enough, and eternity is not long enough to exhaust the excitement and the joy, the praise and the celebration of Christ our Savior's ultimate victory! *Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Jesus lives. He is victorious, and today is the best day as we share in his victory.

But Easter cuts both ways. Jesus lives! That means that this day that is the best day for Christians who celebrate Jesus' victory is the worst day for Jesus' enemies. For the victor comes the thrill of victory. For the vanquished comes the agony of defeat. Lots of people these days say "Happy Easter!" and have fun with furry bunnies and Easter eggs—because Easter is just another holiday on the calendar for cards and candy, right? Not so! Easter is the dividing line between victory and defeat. Because the fact that Jesus lives means that anyone who opposes him is now dealing with an unstoppable force. The risen Lord Jesus said to his disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). The living Jesus as true God owns limitless power. There is no sitting on the fence with Jesus; a human being is either with him or against him. There is no room for ambivalence or indifference. With Jesus at our side, Easter is awesome! With Jesus on the other side, Easter is awful!

Does that mean God is spiteful or vindictive or mean and nasty because he punishes his enemies? No! Very simply, God is love and God is life. God is the source of love, of life, of power, of redemption, of salvation. In Jesus, God's Son, we are connected to God, and we have all those things; all these good things of God become ours. Apart of Jesus there are none of those things. Despise life, you get death. Thumb your nose at redemption, you get eternal bondage in prison. Stand against God's power, it will crush you. God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth, to share in the gift of life and to join in the celebration of Jesus' victory. It is only human folly and rebellion that keeps people separated from life and peace and mired in defeat.

Jesus lives! That means that being connected to Jesus Christ and his body the church is where we want to be. But being a member of Jesus' church is not like membership at Costco or Planet Fitness. What do I mean by that? Well at Costco you pay your membership dues every year, and if you choose not to renew your membership that's up to you. Planet Fitness you pay your monthly membership, but it's up to you whether you actually go to the gym. Unfortunately, lots of people see their church membership the same way. Take it or leave it. Come or go as they please. But it doesn't work that way. Our connection to Jesus Christ is only found through the gospel, and the gospel only comes to us in Jesus' Word and Sacrament. Our connection with the living Jesus is not found on the mountaintops, on the hiking trails, on the putting green or under the covers of my bed on a Sunday morning. It's found in Word and Sacrament. When we are connected to Word and Sacrament our faith grows and thrives because we are connected to Jesus. When we neglect God's Word and stay away from his Sacrament our faith

starves and dies, and our connection with Jesus and his victory is lost. Jesus lives! Feed your faith! Learn of his love! Taste the sweetness of his forgiveness! Grow in his grace!

Jesus lives! We want everyone to share in Jesus' victory. We want our friends, our family members, our neighbors, our coworkers to know the power of Jesus' victory. We want them to share with us the peace of the forgiveness of our sins, the comfort of having Jesus at our side as we go through life, the promise of eternal life. That's why we share the good news whenever we can. We say, "Come on over! Come on over to the side of victory and power and life and forgiveness and peace! It's nice over here! Death has been destroyed; come on over to the side of life. Come on over to the winning team, to the victory with Jesus and the Easter celebration that never ends—not in this life nor in the next." Jesus lives! Amen.