

Death Doesn't Have the Last Say!

Texts: Acts 10:34-43

1 Corinthians 15:19-26 (Series C, Easter Sunday) Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Luke 24:1-12

Prayer:

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! Easter Day is the most joyous day in the Christian year. Our Liturgical journey has taken us through the 40 subdued days of Lent, and in this *Holy Week*, we re-enacted the Last Supper with the humility of foot-washing, walked the Stations of the Cross in some Christian traditions, and experienced the sadness of Good Friday. But that was Friday.

And now we arrive at the most powerful symbol of Christianity – today is Sunday, the *Resurrection of Christ, our Messiah*. The bells and flowers, the alleluias, triumphal music, and soaring voices all proclaiming that Jesus, the Christ, is Risen.

On February 27th 1991, a mother in a small town in Kansas was doing what she always did on a Wednesday, when the phone rang. It was bad news. Her son, Private Clayton Carpenter, had stepped on a landmine in the Persian Gulf War and was dead. She was shocked and grief stricken. She was angry.

Neighbours tried to comfort her but it was of no use. Her loss was too great, the hurt was too deep. Her son would never come home again. Three days later, she received another phone call. The voice on the other end said, "Hi! mum it's me Clayton, I'm alive!"

At first, she couldn't believe it was the voice of her 23year-old son over whom she had mourned for nearly three days. She said, "*I laughed, I cried, I jumped up and down. I was overjoyed! You just don't know how much. My son whom I thought was dead, is really alive.*"

We can only try to imagine what it must have been like for this mother as her tears of grief and loss are turned into tears of unbelievable joy and happiness. What must it be like to be told that a person whom you believed to be dead in actual fact was alive?

Today we are celebrating the most important feast day of the year in the Christian tradition – *the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead*. Artists over centuries have tried to capture the pain of those who cared for the body of Jesus.

Michelangelo's sculpture, the *Pieta*, pictures Mary holding in her arms the torn and broken body of her son. Her expression of grief the same as that of a mother in Palestine, or Iraq, Syria, Yamen, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, or Afghanistan, Ukraine etc. holding a broken child of war, her whole body crying "*Why?*"

She represents all of us when we are faced with the same cruel reality of death, the pain and sorrow that death brings, the emptiness and the sense of a dead-end that fills our souls. The pain that Mary, and the other women must have felt as they laid Jesus to rest in the tomb must be unbearable.

When these same women went to the tomb early on Sunday, they found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. This bewilderment turned to fear as they saw two men with the brightest of bright clothing standing in the tomb.

"*Why are you looking among the dead for one who is alive? He is not here; he has been raised.*" And then with the same excitement and joy that the mother of Private Clayton Carpenter, they raced off to tell the disciples what they had seen and what the angels had told them. "Jesus is alive. He has risen from the dead".

That doesn't mean there is no more dying. You and I, our loved ones, and strangers in near and far-off places, will die. Children will still die in bloody conflicts. Cancer and heart disease will continue to take their toll.

Old age will still be the prelude to dying. The sadness sculptured on the face of Michelangelo's Mary, the *Pieta* will still be seen on the faces of those who hold a loved one in their arms for the last time.

As Mary and the others witnessed Jesus die not in the privacy of a hospital room, but hanging half naked on a cross for all to laugh and jeer at, his death came as cruel blow. That was Friday. But Easter Sunday morning brings a new light on death and its impact on our lives.

There will always be death in this world, but the angel tells the women in Jesus' empty tomb, he says to us, "*You have nothing to fear*". The message tells us that even in the cruelest times, there is *Hope*.

When I use the word "*hope*" I am talking about a certainty, something definite and true. Easter gives us a definite and certain future beyond the grave. We are blessed with a future filled with Hope.

The apostle Paul talked about this quite a bit in his letters saying that because of Easter has been defeated. Death does not have the last say over our eternal future. Jesus removed the power of death to harm us when he died and then rose again from the dead.

Paul said, "*The truth is that Christ has been raised from death, as the guarantee that those who sleep in death will also be raised*" (1 Cor 15:20). Death is not the end, but the beginning of a glorious new life with God our creator.

Unfortunately, this is not the hope that many people follow. People in contemporary society live very much for the moment. We give little thought that all of this will stop the day when our heart stops beating. We act as if this life is all there is. Once we die that's the end of us.

The Danish philosopher *Søren Kirkegaard* once said that we are like smooth stones. You remember the kind you used to pick up and skip across a lake. The stone would bounce once, twice, maybe three times or more, but then it drops silently beneath the surface gone forever. Is that what happens when we die?

Others have said that when we die its like a candle the flickers and goes out never to be seen again. Its once beautiful light is soon forgotten as the rest of the world go on about living out the rest of their days on this earth.

Still others believe that there is a heaven. A lot of people think there is something beyond the grave but they can't be certain. Well! Easter brings the great good news that *He is risen*. Jesus' resurrection from the dead has made our own life beyond the grave certain and true.

He is Lord and master of death. He has made it possible for all who trust and believe in him to have this life forever. *"Why are you looking among the dead for one who is alive? He is not here; he has been raised."*

The same question is being asked of us today on this glorious Easter day. Are we still searching for God, are we still searching for Christ in some pseudo, or New Age religion? To me the answer is very clear.

Today is Sunday, but let us go back to Friday and view Jesus' last words on the Cross was "It is Finished." *Tetelestia* a Greek word used in business *Tetelestia* which meant the *debt is fully paid*. It was also used in judgement and court system which meant *the sentence is fully served*, and then it was also used as a military term *Tetelestia* which meant the *battle has been fully won*.

So, when Jesus said It is Finished *Tetelestia* and this is what is going to bring you **Rest**, he meant three things:

- Your Debt of sin is fully paid.
- The sentence for punishment and judgement for which we deserved has been fully served.
- And the battle against devil and sin, death and all the enemy has been fully won.

Rest in the finished work of the cross. *Tetelestia* Jesus Christ fights the battle and you and I get the victory *Tetelestia*. Life is not a matter of skipping across the surface of a lake like a smooth stone only to end up sinking beneath the surface, and gone forever.

Heaven is not some vague idea of a place we hope to go to when we die. It is certain and true. Eternal life is real. Jesus has given us the victory. There is life after this life.

Without Jesus' resurrection Christianity is dead and has no meaning. Therefore, there is no hope of the life to come. We find the fullness of our souls in the empty tomb. Christ is within us and we are marked as his own forever.

Hymn writer *Francis Pott*: saw this truth when he wrote:

- Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! The strife is o'er, the battle done; the victory of life is won; the song of triumph has begun. Alleluia!
- The powers of death have done their worst, but Christ their legions has dispersed. Let shouts of holy joy outburst. Alleluia!
- Lord, by the stripes which wounded thee, from death's dread sting thy servants free, that we may live and sing to thee. Alleluia!

Yes, today we celebrate a victory and hope of life to come. Christ has won the victory for us over the grave and assures us that death will not hold us down.

Death is not the end for those who believe in Jesus Christ. We join with Paul in his shout: Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Prayer concerns: *Matilda Molyneaux-Piper, Shirley Walker, Hanne Bourgeoise, Sven Berg, Astrid Hylland, Ellen Eriksen, Euclide & Ellen Dahal-Lanteigne, Karen Abazio, Pastor Timothy, the dire tension between Russia and Ukraine, Protectors at various places in Canada, Covid - 19 patients, essential and Frontline workers, Note: of thanks to God as the Covid-19 virus is easing off and more restrictions are being lifted, and finally Families of departed souls in recent weeks and months.*

Prayer: Alleluia! Our Lord is Risen! Holy Jesus, excite our hearts and minds, and transform our souls with the miracle of Your return from the dead. Infuse our consciousness with Your Immortal Presence that our thoughts, words, and actions begin and end in You. We ask through You, our Savior Glorified; and the Holy Spirit, the Fire of our Faith; who together with our Luminous Creator, are One God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- **Jesus Christ Is Risen Today # 356**
- **Christ Jesus Lay in Death's strong Bands # 370**
- **Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds # 367**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

n/a

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

n/a

April 17, 2022