

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fourth Sunday After Easter, May 18, 2025

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 192:1-4, 195:1-2, 201, 205, 191:5-6.

Lessons: Numbers 16:1-3 and 16-35, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, Matthew 25:31-46.

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

You know what the word “resurrection” means. It means rising from the dead, or coming back to life. We are not talking about some kind of fictitious zombie-like thing. We are talking about literally coming back to life after being dead. You know that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and we are reminded from these words of Scripture again today that all men will be raised from the dead and believers in Jesus Christ will be given immortal life.

Where do we get those ideas? Our text is one of the most beautiful places in Scripture where we learn

ABOUT THE RESURRECTION

- 1. On the last day all the dead will be raised and believers shall be clothed with “immortality”.**
- 2. “Death has been swallowed up in victory. “**
- 3. With this confidence, we can give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord.**

Paul here is stating a fact of which he is certain: ***“I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*** So what is he talking about? To find an answer we may look to Jesus’ words to Nicodemus: ***“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”*** John 3:5-6 (NIV)

Those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Savior from all their sins, born again of water and the Holy Spirit, ***“are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”*** Galatians 3:26 (NIV) There is no way that the sinful, unregenerate human can inherit the everlasting kingdom of God’s full glory in heaven without faith in Jesus Christ. To the unbeliever, this is a mystery. Paul says ***“Listen, I tell you a mystery.”*** This is something that is not easily understood, especially by those who reject Jesus Christ.

To anyone who is concerned first of all about this physical world, the things we can see and touch, the earthly things; resurrection seems like a dream, a fiction, a deception, a lie. Everyone, despite all attempts to keep our body healthy, despite all attempts to put off and avoid death will die an earthly death. There is no way around that. For believers in Christ scripture calls that a ***“sleep”***.

Paul elaborates: ***“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.”*** Here is an explanation of that “mystery”. It is plain that no one will know when judgment day, the end of the world, comes. But we do know from Scripture what will happen. We have here a picture of judgment day and how it will come and what will happen at that moment. God’s Word is plain that ***“the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”*** 2 Peter 3:10 (NIV) Paul writes to the Thessalonian Christians: ***“Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.”*** 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 (NIV) Some

people will still be alive at that moment and not all will “sleep” in death. Paul repeats: ***“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.”*** 1 Thessalonians 4:16 (NIV)

In addition to Jesus separating the believers from unbelievers like a shepherd who divides sheep from goats, as you heard in our Gospel lesson, God tells us: ***“For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”***

This body we are living in is perishable. It will decay. It will return to dust. God clearly told Adam after the fall into sin: ***“You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust.”*** Genesis 3:19 (HCSB) Moses, as recorded in the Psalms, writes of God: ***“You turn men back to dust, saying, ‘Return to dust, O sons of men.’”*** Psalm 90:3 (NIV)

“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.’” The body that has died and decayed, will rise and become alive. Jesus himself said when he was talking about the resurrection of the dead: ***“a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear [my] voice and come out--those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”*** John 5:28-29 (NIV) Peter assures us by inspiration of the Holy Ghost ***“that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.”*** Acts 24:15 (NIV) Not only those who believed in Christ and looked forward to their resurrection, but also those who did not believe and did not expect to or want to arise will come out of their graves. It will happen. The same soul which departed from the body in death will again make this body its dwelling place. Each body will have its former soul, and each soul will dwell in its own body.

Yet there is a great difference between believers and unbelievers. The wicked, the unbelievers, are resurrected and God is the ***“One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”*** Matthew 10:28 (NIV) Hell is a place ***“where the fire never goes out.”*** Mark 9:43 (NIV) and they will suffer forever ***“in agony in this fire.”*** Luke 16:24 (NIV) Even in the Old Testament the picture of resurrection is clear: ***“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”*** Daniel 12:2 (NIV) Isaiah speaks of hell in this way, where ***“the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.”*** Isaiah 66:24 (NIV)

Believers are raised in power, strong and vigorous, free from the weaknesses, infirmities, defects, and the devastating consequences of sin. They will be raised as perfect bodies. God ***“will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*** Revelation 21:4 (NIV) ***“The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”*** Matthew 13:43 (NIV)

On judgment day believers will have the same body which decayed but it will be changed to an incorruptible, glorious body that will not perish. Then the saying ***“Death has been swallowed up in victory”*** will finally come true. Paul here repeats what Isaiah said 700 hundred years earlier. God ***“will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.”*** Isaiah 25:8 (NIV)

Here you have language that speaks of something swallowing up something else. Jews had evidence from their history in the wilderness of the earth opening up and swallowing rebellious unbelievers from their midst. If you pay any attention to worldly entertainment, you probably have seen movies where some kind of monster swallows up and kills people, unless some kind of superhero rescues mankind. In such movies, of course, these things are purely fiction.

The real truth is found in what Jesus Christ did for us and will do for us. Death will be swallowed up in victory! Death will not win. Sure, all men are destined to die an earthly death. But believers can and will rejoice. They can boast; they can shout: ***“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** 1 Corinthians 15:55-57 (KJV) This rejoicing will not only happen in heaven. We don’t have to wait until heaven to get a taste of heaven. We have that hope and confidence within us even now.

God is saying yes, death, you thought you had won but you didn't. You put men in the grave. You even put Jesus Christ in the grave. But it couldn't hold Jesus. Your victory was taken away when Jesus rose from the dead, in case you didn't remember. All men will be brought back to life. You now have no more sting. And a sting is something that hurts the one being stung.

Earlier in the chapter Paul wrote ***“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”*** 1 Corinthians 15:20-26 (NIV)

“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.” The Law shows us our sinfulness. The Law of God isn't just a ladder we can climb one step at a time until we earn God's good will and favor and are then rewarded for our good deeds and enter heaven.

The law shows us our sinfulness and that without Christ we are really powerless against sin. And it is sin that gives death its sting. Just as we are powerless if caught in the midst of a swarm of stinging bees, so we have no power of ourselves to fight and defend ourselves against the sting of death.

We've already been reminded of the fact that all men, by nature, of ourselves, are under the power of sin. ***“But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”***

Because we have victory through Jesus Christ – after all, he rose from the grave and came back to life – we who believe that fact and put all our confidence and hope in Jesus Christ shall overcome death.

We see Jesus Christ called ***“Lord”***. That's a word that means master, one who has power over someone or something, one who is in charge. We sometimes forget that our Lord Jesus Christ has all power in heaven and on earth.

And so he gives us the victory! So what's our reaction? Do we take that fact, that good news, that message, that confidence for granted? Do we regularly hear that message of our salvation together with others, or do other things come first when we have the opportunity to worship with those who believe, teach, and confess as we do?

Because God ***“gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”*** we give thanks to God. He sacrificed his only-begotten Son to save us. He then brought that Son back to life!

There, you have heard the good news again. Now what? ***“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”***

We must stand fast. Satan and his allies are all around us, pulling at us to join them in all the things that the world finds so enticing, all the things that appeal to our flesh, or to things that seem like fun. Satan is also appealing to our desire for praise or to our mental abilities which God has given us, or to – well, the list could go on and on. In his first letter John warns and admonishes us: ***“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”*** 1 John 2:15-17 (NIV)

We need to be preserved and guarded, as you often hear in the words after the Amen of the sermon. Near the end of his letter to the Philippian Christians, Paul writes ***“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*** Phil. 4:4-7 (NIV) Amen.