Easter Is a Matter of Life and Death

1. The midst of death, we live
2. In spite of death, we live

1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

VIVIT!

When is the last time that you went in for a physical? After all, why waste precious time and money going to get my knees knocked on with a rubber hammer when can walk just fine? You pretty much know what the doctor is going to say before the results of the physical come back: Blood work is OK. Normal thyroid. Blood pressure is a bit high, we’ll keep an eye on that. The cholesterol is pushing 300, so its time to lay off the butter burgers for a bit.... But every now and again, you hear about someone who went to the doctor for your everyday physical and that visit ended up being life changer. That’s not back pain you think you feel, what you really need is a quadruple bypass – and you’re not going home until you get it. Or another, your cholesterol came back normal for your age, but according to the blood work we think you might have leukemia. Suddenly, you are faced with a life or death issue.

Your Christian faith is a matter of life and death. And don’t think for a second that the devil doesn’t know it. Easter brings the life and death struggle between God and the devil, good and evil, faith and unbelief into bold relief. Just hold onto your pew and you’ll see its true. Yes, Easter is a matter of life and death.

We’ll see that 1) In the midst of death, we live and 2) In spite of death, we live.

The Gospel of life – life in Christ - had come to a city full of the spiritual death. Colossae was full of paganism, polytheism, and yes, prostitution. One by one, the Lord made dead Colossians ALIVE in the name of Jesus who was ALIVE even though he was once dead. The devil couldn’t stand the thought of the Lord of Life being the Lord of the Colossians, so the devil began sewing the seeds of death in their hearts. Notice how Satan works, he didn’t come and lead the Colossians down the road of open unbelief – turning them into a bunch of immoral drunks. No, the devil was clever in Colossae. He came and began to whisper some pretty seductive stuff into their ears: “Jesus is just alright with me. Now all you have to do is add a pinch of angel worship and a dash of self-discipline. Add in a heaping portion of watch your P’s and Q’s and in the end, you’ll live.” In the end, that’s a recipe for death and the devil knows it! St. Paul calls the Colossians to their senses as he exposes this ‘do-it-yourselfer’ brand of Christianity. He writes just before the words of our text: 20 Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 21 “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? 22 These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings.

Do you want to really live people of Colossae? Do you want to really live people of Trinity, Waukesha, guests, friends, and visitors? There is only one way to truly live this little thing we call life. We live it connected by faith to the LIVING Son of God!

1. In the midst of death we live

Do you want to live in the midst of death? Listen to what the Holy Spirit says through St. Paul: “1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” Did you hear that? You have already been raised with Christ! No, Judgement Day didn’t come last evening! When Paul says we
have been RAISED with Christ, it’s a way of picturing our CONVERSION. The Bible says that we were once DEAD in our transgressions and sins. The Scripture clearly teaches that our sinful minds were once HOSTILE to God. The Bible clearly teaches that we were once BLIND to God’s truth. The Lord of Life cut through our sin and death and breathed new life into our dry bones! In the midst of spiritual death, we began to live – really live! Think of it: Our sins are forgiven through Jesus’ death and his resurrection. Our life now has a focus – serving our living Savior. Our future is rosy too! Life with the Lamb forever in heaven.

Make no mistake about it! You have been raised with Christ... Our conversion from unbelief to faith in Christ is a real, honest-to-goodness resurrection! But we don’t always recognize it as such. A physical resurrection like Jesus performed on 4-day-dead Lazarus? Now that’s a resurrection! That’s life in the midst of death! Or what if Jesus were to raise up a loved one, and bring him back to us for one single day, we would be dumbfounded! Well then, don’t underestimate the resurrection to life – to a living faith – that the Lord has already performed on you! Next time you see a little kid baptized into the name of the Holy Trinity, be wowed! You are witnessing a resurrection to life in the midst of death. The next time God’s Word is preached to you and your faith is strengthened, think WOW! Live in the midst of death! The next time you receive the living Lord’s body and blood in the sacrament, think WOW!! Life in the midst of death!

Because we have been raised with Christ from spiritual death to spiritual life, we are now encouraged – yes, commanded – to focus our hearts upon HEAVENLY THINGS. What is the major focus of this morning? Bunnies? Bonnets? Ham? Turkey? Relatives? Relaxation? No, a Ham and an hour on the couch has never saved a single soul. Set your heart and mind on heavenly things: Jesus’ death and resurrection, Jesus calling you to faith, Jesus’ deadly duel with the devil on our behalf, Jesus gift of Prayer, Word, and Sacraments – those are heavenly things, real treasure that give us real life in the midst of death.

Easter is a matter of life and death. And frankly, the devil hates the fact that he’s licked! The devil would love to stuff Christ back in the cold grave. He can’t. The devil would love to nail us into the coffin of unbelief, lead us astray in the mind-numbing fog of materialism, afflict us with the ultimate ticking time bomb – “indifferentitis of the heart.” Be certain of this: if the Lord would have us think of heavenly things, the devil wants to focus us on EARTHLY THINGS. Do you know that the average American teenager watches 20-40 hours of TV a week? Did you know that in TV land, 80% of sex takes place outside of marriage. Focus on heavenly things, not earthly things! Think of the care that goes into earthly bodies! We know the # of fat grams in an ounce of Swiss Cheese, but the # of books in the Bible – lets not get carried away! Focus on heavenly things, not earthly things! We work like a bunch of squirrels to amass a pile of earthly stuff, and then we work the longer hours to pay for our stuff, and in the end we find no time to enjoy the stuff. Focus on heavenly things, not earthly things! And my friends, can I be most specific? Some of you will not grace the doors of his house to worship him again for several months. No big deal is Jesus is just your average dead guy. But if he is the living Lord who once walked out of his tomb on Easter morning, then he’s worth a few more hours of your time between now and Christmas Eve. Don’t listen to me. Listen to God: Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Why focus on heavenly things? Because heavenly things are FAR BETTER than things that can be felt or touched. We have the Son of God who was crucified and now lives again! Easter is the living proof that we live in the midst of death! If Jesus were just another dead guy, our faith would be as good as that dead guy. If Jesus were just another dead guy, our forgiveness would be as real as that dead guy. If Jesus were just another dead guy, a grave – not heaven – would be our dead end. But Jesus lives – really, physically, substantially, actually, truly, totally! And because he lives our life is now connected – hidden – with him!

2. In spite of death, we live

Are you convinced yet that Easter is a matter of life and death? Christ brings us to live in the midst of death! But Jesus takes it even one step further! Not only do we live as his people in the midst of death.
We will continue to live IN SPITE of death. St. Paul writes: 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

That’s God’s truth! Suppose for a second now, that it wasn’t true! Let’s just suppose that Jesus never rose from the dead. Let’s just suppose that sin was no big deal. Let’s pretend that heaven and our salvation were just made up. What are you left with? Stuff. And by the way, you really can’t take it with you. Just ask Solomon:

4 I undertook great projects... I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. 8 I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well-- the delights of the heart of man. 9 I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. 10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. 11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun. Without Easter, what are you left with at the end of life? According to Solomon: a handful of wind!

But it is even worse than that. I said that this sermon intends to convince you that Easter is a matter of life and death! I’m here to tell you that’s the case. Part of my job is dealing with death. I’ve talked with people who were afraid of death. I’ve talked with people suddenly got better and - it seems - cheated death. I’ve talk with people about eternal death. I’ve been with people at the time of their death. One thing I am absolutely convinced of: Our American view of death – that it only comes quietly to those who have lived very happily for at least 80 years – is nowhere in the realm of reality. Death comes to the old and young, to those who are ready and to those who aren’t, to those who accept it and those who fight it. Friends, if Easter is only about bunnies, then the funeral parlor becomes a horrific place – no matter how nice the local funeral directors are.

But now, listen. I have two words for you. I want you to sing them today. I want you to pray them tonight. I want you to ponder them tomorrow morning - yes, make them a motto for the rest of your life. Finally, I want you to say them as you die: JESUS LIVES! And because God’s Son lives again, there can be no doubts – we will live again in spite of death. Death seems like it’s the end. Its only the beginning of forever with the Lord, because JESUS LIVES! The grave seems scary, but in the end its only a good place to catch a nap, because JESUS LIVES! Our earthly bodies wear our, weaken, and ‘give up the ghost’ – but only for a time, because JESUS LIVES. And because Jesus lives, we too will one day see him body and soul in glory. Don’t take my word for it. Listen to God. Listen to what he says through Job: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see him with my own eyes - I and not another." (Job 19:25-27)

May Jesus – the risen Lord – keep you in the saving, living Easter-faith until we all see him face to face! Then we’ll see that Easter wasn’t so much about life and death. Actually, its about death – and LIFE! Amen.

SDG