

In Living

Death and Life: Part 3 “In Living”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – April 16, 2023

2nd Sunday of Easter

Readings: Acts 2:14a, 22-32; 1 Peter 1:3-9

Reflection: Psalm 16

Greeting: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new life. A living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And an inheritance that is imperishable and unfading!

Prayer: Almighty God, through Jesus Christ you overcame death and opened to us the door of eternal life. Renew and refresh us in your Holy Spirit as we celebrate the miracle of the empty tomb. Let the light of our Lord’s resurrection lift our hearts on this day. May we be freed from slavery to sin and death and arise into a life of righteousness through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 16

Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.” As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble ones in whom is all my delight. Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips. The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage. I bless the Lord, who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. For you do not give me up to Sheol or let your faithful one see the Pit. You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 16 and hear of taking refuge in God. That we find security and joy with our Lord. That God is with us in all of our sorrow and rejoicing. That God’s light lifts us from the darkness. How do you give thanks for God’s grace? How do you invite others to share in that grace? How do you live a life in Christ? How can we come together to experience God’s great love? How have our hearts and lives been changed forever because of our Risen Savior?

Prayer: O God, our bread, our milk, and our honey: In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us to your table. Feed us with your plenty, and enlarge our table for all the hungry. We thank you for all you have already done and the great love that has been shown to us. We lift

up our joys and our concerns, bringing all things before you. May we experience your grace in our laughter and our tears. May you strengthen us in sorrow and in celebration, knowing you are with us. And may you guide us in love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Alleluia.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Acts chapter 2 verse 14a and verse 22 through 32.

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Fellow Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having released him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover, my flesh will live in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades or let your Holy One experience corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.' "Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.' "This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. (Acts 2:14a, 22-32 NRSV)*

Our next reading comes from 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 3 through verse 9.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:3-9 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Today marks the end of our three-part series on death and life. We have seen what we can learn in dying from the crucifixion. We have seen what we learn in rising through resurrection. Today we move forward with the knowledge that we have and how we use it in

living. Because what we are presented with at this point is that with our knowledge of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are shown how to live. We move forward in that knowledge and in that free gift of grace that has been given to us. It is Peter's voice that we hear today in our readings. Peter recounts the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ. Peter also tells us of how those events impact the way that we live. In First Peter, we are presented with the fact that we are given a living hope and a new life because of Christ's death and resurrection. That we have been given the opportunity to truly live. We are raised from a life of sin and death into a new life in the Spirit with the hope of resurrection. We are given this hope and strengthened by this hope. This eternal hope is ours so that we may know and embrace the new life that we have been given.

But we also have to acknowledge that going forward we will also have struggles. We understand we have been given a gift of grace, free for all people. Not a gift we may earn but a gift that has been freely given by God the Father, demonstrated through the love of the Son, and that we accept it now by the Spirit. Peter speaks of our "inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading." That we are given cause to rejoice, celebrating this wonderful grace. But we also must recognize that we may face suffering. And we can sometimes look at suffering and get some odd ideas. Sometimes we think that any suffering we face is persecution. Sometimes we paint suffering as something from God that is being used to test us. We decide that suffering is part of God's big plan for us because "everything happens for a reason." I don't think that is what Peter is saying at all here. I think Peter is saying that we hold true to our faith because we know that we can find purpose in suffering through God. Not that suffering is something we must face for faith to be really genuine, but that faith helps us to overcome suffering. Not that God wants us to suffer, but that we can find purpose through suffering when we overcome difficulty by faith. There is a difference there between "everything happens for a reason" and "we can find purpose in God everywhere." The difference is that we could suffer for a number of reasons big and small and possibly not even know the why of it all. But we learn by Christ's example of how to suffer in love that we may find purpose and that our faith may be refined in that fire so that we are strengthened instead of weakened. I think it is important for us to recognize the difference here, because we could be tempted to say that everything is a test from God. Which leads us to say that if someone hasn't been tested in the same way that their faith just isn't as genuine. We may discredit someone's faith because they have not faced the same experiences. And any time that we begin to put a measurement in place for who has the stronger faith, we begin to diminish our own trust in Christ. I don't believe God is planning suffering for us.

I don't believe God is making us suffer to test our faith. But I do think that suffering is one of the ways that we understand the crucifixion and the resurrection. Because our faith helps us to grow in suffering and to walk out the other side stronger than ever. Because it reveals to us the character of Jesus Christ. That our suffering reminds us of his suffering. That his suffering reminds us of the hope of the resurrection. Because the despair is never greater

than the joy, because we believe in Christ. Because we believe in love. We believe in his love and his goodness and all that he taught. That his love was demonstrated to us to be the most genuine love we could ever know by his suffering and death on the cross. And in rising delivers us from slavery to sin and death and gives us a hope eternal, so that no matter how we may suffer, we may always cling to hope. That no matter how difficult things might feel, we are reminded that there is hope. No matter how dark things get we are reminded that there is light. And that we have to remember this because life is full of ups and downs. Life is a mix of celebrations and sorrows. It is a mix of joy and sadness. That we can even find sorrow in our celebrations. Because even the things that bring us great joy can cause us some form of sadness as well. But it helps to remember that salvation is a part of it all.

I say all this because sometimes we don't know what to do with everything that we take in. That we hear about Christ's death and it fills us with sorrow. And we hear about the resurrection, and it fills us with joy. And then comes the Sunday after. Now what are we? Are we joyful? Are we sorrowful? Are we still hurting? Are we triumphant? What does it mean to us as Easter people? Does the resurrection cancel out all of our hurt? No. I think that is part of what Peter is telling us today. That in life we may still face suffering. We may still face tragedy. We may still face difficulty. We may still face heartbreak. We may still face despair. But what the crucifixion and the resurrection has taught me about all of this is that we never face it alone. And I mean that twofold. That we will never face it alone because Christ will be with us in all things. In our hope and in our despair, Christ is with us. In living, in dying, and in rising, Christ is with us. That in this new life that we have because of Christ, we are never left on our own. That Christ is always with us to help us to celebrate and to help us to mourn. Christ is there for us each and every day. No matter what may come our way, Jesus is there. But that's not all. Because the second part is that it also means that we now share a bond in Christ. We share it in understanding the gift that has been given to us. That we understand the love that has been shown to us. That as we experience the death and the resurrection together, that we experience a love that unites us as a community. Because of it, we are bound together as the body of Christ redeemed by his blood. That we are one in our Risen Savior. That as one people, we carry with us the hope that Christ has instilled in our hearts together. Because of that we strengthen each other in living. It means that when we face sorrow, we don't face it alone because we face it together as a community. That when one is too weak to stand, there are others there to help them to stand and to keep moving forward. Because we continue in life together. We are united in Christ so that we may face all things together. That when we suffer, we do not suffer alone because we have each other in Christ. Because we share together in the love that we are shown on the cross. We share in the hope that we are given in resurrection. That we share that love and that hope together as a community so that we may help each other through anything because we are united in Christ. That we may help one another because we are strengthened by the Spirit. That we help each other in the boldness of our Heavenly Father. That we may lift each other up knowing that we are blessed to walk with Christ in this journey.

That is what I wanted to speak to us today about when we talk about what it means to go forth and live. Because it means that we take the knowledge that we have gained, the love that we have gained, and the hope that we have gained by the cross of Christ. That we go forth together strengthened by Christ in all things. That we are joined together, united in a bond that goes above all others. A hope that is beyond all other hopes. Because we share together in a life that goes beyond death. Because we are united in God's steadfast love that endures forever. We are united in the grace that has been shown to us. We are united in being able to share that grace with others. Because in suffering Christ showed us how to love, an eternal sign that we are never alone. And in rising Christ showed us that there is always hope and there is always something more because God is with us. That we are bound together in hope and love so that we may know that there is always more to learn in Christ. So it is that we go forth as people inspired by love. We go forth as a people strengthened in hope. That because of God's grace we may share Christ with everyone by sharing the love of our Savior. That we may strengthen each other in suffering, knowing that we are blessed with hope. That in our rejoicing we may be united in faith. That we are united in love, because in dying and in rising, Christ has shown us what it truly means to live. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Death and Life

Our current series is a 3-part exploration of death and life. We will work our way through death on a cross, resurrection, and what it means for how we live. We begin with Palm Sunday, Easter, and the Sunday after. Each week confronts another part of our faith journey through death and life.

April 2nd – *In Dying* – Matthew 21:1-11; Matthew 27:27-50

April 9th – *In Rising* – John 20:1-18; Acts 10:34-43

April 16th – *In Living* – Acts 2:14a, 22-32; 1 Peter 1:3-9

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Our Healthcare Workers	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Phyllis Gabel	Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor
Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Jackie Potter	Phil Hawickhorst
Ray Carr	Jane Williams	Alice Sherwood	Richard Durham
Kathy Hanks	Steve Carlen	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Family of Kyle Lehman	Corrine Howard	Stacy Janes	Don Gilmore
Shirley Jester	Connie Brown	Jack Pitcher	Family of Alberta Darling
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Greg Williams	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte	Lavon Figgins		

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