

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Watertown, WI**

**“The Devourer Has Been Devoured!”**

Rev. David K. Groth  
Easter Sunday, 2021

“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. On this mountain he will swallow up the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever” (Is. 25.6).

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

It is the very best news possible. It means Jesus is Lord. It means He is God’s Son who has defeated death, as He said He would. It means we can trust *all* His promises. It means, in the language of our Psalm, that he “holds my lot” (16:5) and has purchased for me a “beautiful inheritance” (v. 6), and we can look forward to “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forevermore” (v. 11). All the promises are secure. That’s what His resurrection means to us.

But it’s not what it initially meant to those women who first visited the tomb. The angel told them, “He has risen; He is not here” but “they said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.” The best news the world has ever heard locked up tight in the hearts of fearful people.

But these women . . . they sound very real to me. They sound like people who know all about death and its grip on us. They’ve seen people die. They’ve prepared other bodies for entombment. They know how it goes. We are born. We live. We wear out. We die. Though dreary and dark and fatalistic, that hard truth is universally accepted. That knowledge is what Isaiah calls the “covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations”.

You know what Isaiah is talking about: all the little reminders that, because of sin, there is death (“The soul that sins shall die” Ezek. 18:20). And so, every one of us experiences these little reminders of looming death. It’s in your shortness of breath climbing the stairwell from the lower parking lot. It’s in the soreness of your knees and muscles after a workout, or the frustrating search for names, or when it takes longer and longer to do less and less. These reminders of looming death are all around.

Then there’s the fear that accompanies the threat of death. Most of the time it burns like the pilot light, but occasionally it flares up. Luther writes, “Even irrational animals recoil from dying . . . But we human beings die the death of sin, for because of sin death is imposed on us. . . That is why our death is infinitely hard and more terrible than the death of other creatures, for [unlike them] we must fear God’s wrath and judgment, which follow upon death and are eternal. But for this man would not be so much concerned about death. [He’s right, isn’t he? If death is just the end, then it’s no big deal.] Luther continues: “To be sure, it hurts to leave spouse and children, good friends, beautiful homes and all the other things we love on this earth. Yet, it is nothing compared with the misery of knowing we are sinners, awaiting the judgment of God and being exposed to death which we can never escape” (WLS, p. 366-367).

In the Bible, death is like an insatiable beast. The Bible pictures death feeding on its victims. It is the great swallower of every living thing. Isaiah 5 says, "The grave enlarges its appetite and opens its mouth without limit; into it will descend their nobles and masses" (vs. 14). Proverbs 27 says "Death is never satiated" (v. 20). Habakkuk 2 says "the greedy man, like death, never has enough" (v.5).

That makes sense to us. We know about this dark pall of death that is spread over all nations. But see how God now turns the tables on death. "On this mountain, the LORD of hosts will swallow up the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever." Now look who's doing the swallowing! Now look who's insatiable! God is not merely pecking at it or using His fork to move unappetizing food around on the plate. No, He's swallowing up death forever. On the mountain of calvary, a mountain not measured by elevation but by impact, on this mountain God in Jesus Christ has Himself wolfed down that insatiable beast. He has devoured the great devourer. He has swallowed up the great swallower. 1 Cor. 15, "Death is *swallowed up* in 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, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

What then of the fear of death? Repeatedly the Bible tells us that because of Christ, we need not fear death anymore. "Fear not little flock, for the Father has chosen to give you the kingdom" (Lk. 12:32). According to Jesus dying is little more than falling asleep. For example, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him up" (Jn. 11:11). Again, from Luther, "Since death is called a sleep, we know that we shall not [forever] remain in it; but we shall awake and live again . . . [In fact,] it will seem as if we had just dropped off, so that we shall rebuke ourselves for having been appalled and frightened at so fine a sleep" (WLS, p. 379). Elsewhere he calls the grave a fine "feather bed". He writes, "Disease, death, and the grave mean nothing else than that God is laying you gently like a child in a cradle in which you will sleep sweetly until the Last Day" when you will be resurrected.

This is the ultimate deliverance. You know, we may be delivered from poverty or oppression. We may be delivered from disease. But until we are delivered from death and the sin which results in death, all the other deliverances are a mockery, a fleeting reprieve.

Now, because God has feasted on death, we get to feast with him in paradise. This is no potluck luncheon. No, this is the marriage feast between Christ and His bride, the church . . . where the absolute best is served, a feast like no other. A feast of rich food and aged wine. Literally, the Hebrew says a feast of fat things. People in Isaiah's day did not have to worry about cholesterol. The well marbled portions of the meat were the very best. According to Leviticus, the fatty portions of the sacrifices were reserved for God. But here God is the one doing the serving, and he's serving the best and richest portions to His people, along with the finest of wines.

Somehow, someone conjured up the notion that in heaven we will sit around on overstuffed clouds strumming gilded harps. So dull! In contrast, Scripture describes heaven being in part an elaborate feast of the best food and the finest wines, with a reunion of people you know and love, with music and laughter and the Lord Himself as the life of the party.

But first, any residual grief must be assuaged. Scripture uses the most tender terms to describe how the Lord will do this. Scripture could have said when we get to heaven God will

take away the grief of death, because that's the obvious meaning. Instead, Scripture makes it unforgettable. "The Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces." Imagine that!

For now, the grief lingers and loiters and at times ambushes. After the death of a loved one, the passage of time helps us to cope better, but coping with grief is very different from enjoying the cure of death. The cure comes not with the passage of time. The cure comes with resurrection. 1 Cor. 15, "We will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" (vs. 51-52). The cure comes with the great reunion of saints in paradise. 1 Thessalonians, "For the Lord himself will descend . . . with the sound of the trumpet. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up **together with them**" (1 Thess. 4:13ff). The cure is when he renews our strength so that we shall run, and not be weary (Is. 40:31). The cure is when he will make the lame to leap like the deer, and those who cannot speak will sing for joy! (Is. 35:6). The cure is when the whole creation is made new. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together" (Is. 11:6). Isaiah 35, "The wasteland will rejoice and blossom with spring crocuses" (v. 1). The cure is when "Death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

Finally, Isaiah concludes this wonderful passage with an invitation to you, this day. "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; *let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.*" Amen.

Christ is risen!

**He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**