

THE EASTER LESSON: Acts 10:34-43
THE GOSPEL: Luke 24:1-12

Easter Sunday
April 14, 2019

“Easter Doxology”
Sermon Preached by Pastor Lowell Nelson
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Grace and peace be to you through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is risen. Alleluia. Thank you, God, for bringing us together to hear the most important message of your promise and your promises being made true through Jesus Christ our Lord. I pray that this is a sermon of encouragement for you to live your life confident in God’s promises being kept and the promises to come and all united in our love for Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our Lenten journey used the Lord’s Prayer as our theme, and I loved hearing our pastors preach, and I loved the lay testimonies about how the Lord’s Prayer touched members of our community’s life. I saved the best for the last, “for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.” That is the theme of Easter, this doxology, these words of praise that allow us to have confidence in our life and yes, in our death and in our life to come. Death is still taboo as a subject. It is painful; it is a reality that we often deny. For you who are visiting, you heard my dad passed away this week. This Holy Week has been renewed for me to hear the words and to understand the importance of God’s promises for my father, for my life, for your life. A kind of silly, little lead-in to this. Years ago I was with pastors, and we were out playing golf, and, you know, you can banter while you play golf, and you’re just talking about silly things, and so I made this observation to my golfing partners that it’s just going to be a horrible loss to the world, a true tragedy when I pass away. So, the bantering that came back was Pastor Glen said, “You know, it will be difficult, but after the service, the funeral service for you, and I start smelling that ham and those scalloped potatoes and the green beans,” he looked at me and he says, “I think I’ll get over it.” And so, you know, it’s that kind of joy which is in that comfort which is this is not the end of the story, right? The end of the story is God’s ending, not just simply our ending but God’s ending. And it’s so amazing how God’s ending comes towards us from the future. What I mean by that is God’s certainly set into the power of life the resurrection of Jesus Christ, not an analogy, not a metaphor, but the reality of God’s creative and redemptive power made real.

The Gospel story, you know obviously people still are perplexed and sometimes think about these words as an idle tale, but brothers and sisters, this is the truth in the scriptures. One of the reasons I understand this story to be true is just that if it was not a true story, they never would have set it up this way, worked so hard. Women have exerted leadership and certainly over this past century, there’s been tremendous gains in leadership and respect for women’s authority, but back in these days, women were not even able testify in court, because their testimony was suspect based purely upon gender. And yet, here’s the Gospel story. Mary Magdalene is the apostle to the apostles. She’s the one who shares the good news. And so this is anything but a fake story or fake news; this is the reality of women leaders whose life was touched by the divine in this continuing of the message. I give thanks to God for the confidence in which we can understand the power of the resurrection. And yet, at the same time, I’m so overjoyed to be able to share something that’s meaningful to me. In seminary, a professor named Ted Peters talked about it. It’s called prolepsis or proleptic. It’s this understanding that the future impacts the current, and it is to understand that what had happened to Christ is our future, when we will be resurrected from

the dead. And we're able to anticipate that future reality; we're able to draw upon its power now. And so, I just love the image of the past and the certainty of the resurrection and the confidence for you and for me the resurrection to come, combining to create the power of now, that the Lord is with us and to draw upon this. It's not just a return to that which was old but the future arrival for the first time of new creation.

Our son, Joe is an engineer; he's in the Dallas area. He works for Texas, has its power grid. He has to try to figure out how to coordinate nuclear and coal and wind and all these other powers that they have to keep the system up. Of course, he's not alone in that, but it's important work, and, so he was working on what happens if it all goes down. That would be very scary. And what that is called is system restoration, where you come up from absolute no power to full power. And I teased him, I said, "That is exactly what I am preaching on this week, too." System restoration, OK? For Jesus, for you and for me, for all of creation, this is the love of God. For thine is the kingdom, that Jesus will reign until he's put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. This is his power: The Holy Spirit, the same spirit who raised Jesus will raise us from the dead. And the glory: He is Lord of all. We will sing a risen, conquering Son. This tremendous glory forever and ever and ever. The past, the future, the present. Jesus Christ is the first fruits is the first Corinthians text. Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have come. And so, from this is the confidence that we can anticipate our future, knowing that God keeps all promises. This is the simple statement, you can trust God for your life and for your future. This is the most beautiful statement I can give you this day. You can trust God.

This is my first Easter here, and I was going to tease the kids. I didn't see you at the 7:00 service, right? Sleeping in a little bit? But we have another service at 11:00. We do it 3 times on this weekend along with the Saturday service, where we proclaim this good news. And the beauty of the flowers here reminds me of the power of the resurrection message. Where it came true to me was when I was in Tanzania, and I was invited to a funeral service near Mount Kilimanjaro in the beautiful rich soil of that area. As a pastor, it was an honor to have this matriarch of the family, who was well into her 90s, which is highly unusual in Tanzania, and her funeral service. It was different than ours. What I'm trying to say is the power of the resurrection and the absolute truth doesn't deny the pain and the sorrow that comes from death, because we are human, and we grieve the loss of those loved ones in this life. But the imagery there hit me, because during the service itself is when the grave is dug. Thirty to 40 people, after words of comfort and support, begin digging the grave then and there. It takes 20, 30 minutes to do, and it's hard work, and it's right there in front of you, and everybody is seeing exactly what is happening, and then the body is laid to rest, and then comes the other part where the dirt is laid over the top. Again, many, many people involved and great duration, and so that's what I thought was the end of the story, just this reality of death until 100s of people (just touches my heart) brought plants and shrubs and beautiful flowers and turned it into the Garden of Eden. And, it was tremendous, this hope and confidence we have in the future. And so I ask you and you see these, is this confidence, do these lilies trumpet it forth, this understanding? Let it be so that we can trust God, and he is risen indeed.

As I move into this next week, and as I return for my father's funeral, I wanted to thank everybody. You know, we do mourn, but we mourn as people with hope, with confidence in the future. So, as my dad is laid to rest, I was going to tease you just a tiny bit, which is if you have any prayers for the family, I want you to pray for us, but pray for South Dakota roads. My dad's going to be laid to rest in a remote, rural cemetery north of Vermilion, and as you know, this time of year, I don't know, if we have to use my cousin's tractor to get him there, then that's fitting. Dad was a farmer before he was a pastor.

And, there's been a lot of moisture. But, as we gather there, I was thinking about the service. I've teased members of the congregation for this, that my brother and sister are so fortunate that I'm the oldest, and I can provide leadership to them. (That deserves a bigger laugh.) I think Debbie has let me know that I am now kicked off a couple committees. They don't need my help in planning the luncheon or other things, but I was putting together the funeral service, and I have some experience in that, and I was so touched, I just want to share something with you that, to me, describes the power of the resurrection. My dad was very formal, so if you were going to come in for a hug, he had a very pietistic Swedish way of sticking out his hand to shake. So you come in, and he could just stick that right there and stop you in your tracks. But, in his last congregation, where he wasn't serving on the staff but he was a member of the congregation, he volunteered, as many of you do, for the good, and he taught the special needs classes of people in their 20s and 30s, 40s, 50s, even some in their 60s, living a long life at St. Timothy's Lutheran Church, with developmental disabilities but a tremendous love for the Lord. And so, they would have none of this shaking of hands. He would teach a class; they'd come in and say, "We love you Pastor Nelson." It took about 2 years, but they won. He would hug. You know what was great? He started hugging us. Right? Just cascading out there, this message that to me this confidence that God's love wins, that the resurrection is true. We have nothing to fear, and, so, I know my heart's going to break open, because there'll be a choir of 40 special needs people singing. Won't it be beautiful? And, to me, that's the power of the resurrection. Why will it be such a great service? Because Lowell planned it? No, it's because people are proclaiming the love of God, the power of the resurrection, the absolute truth that we can be confident in our own life and, yes, in our death and in the life to come. And so, this journey of faith is I just ask you to place full confidence in what God has said God can do and that is that you will have life and have it for eternity.

I wanted special encouragement as I conclude the sermon here for today is encouragement for those who are young. Now, for you who are young, here in Sun City, we get confused. We think young is under 65, but I'm speaking of younger, like under 25 or so is that when you hear of the resurrection and you celebrate Easter is that you have a confidence that Jesus is Lord of all, including yourself. You are part of God's family, and rest assured that the rest of your life, you are part of this amazing movement of God for now and into eternal life. For those in their middle ages, somewhere 30 to 60 or something like that, these wonderful years of labor and of families, remember that Jesus Christ died for us, forgiving all sins, who believe and trust in his name. Nothing can separate you from the love of God. Be open and live your life. For those of us who are older, we remember the words that we hear: Death is destroyed. And we have confidence now and into our future because of the power of the resurrection. I give thanks that we are united on this Easter Sunday. I ask this in Jesus' name to continue to bless us as people of hope and encouragement, our past, our future, beneath us and above us, all surrounded by God's love. He is risen. Amen.