

**FIRST LESSON: Acts 9:1-6**  
**SECOND LESSON: Revelation 5:11-14**  
**THE GOSPEL: John 21:1-9**

**The Third Sunday of Easter**  
**May 5, 2019**

**“Resurrection Living”**  
**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. Amen.

Resilient living is a term that I hear sometimes these days: resiliency, the ability to bounce back from the circumstances of life, and that is a good practice to participate in, but as people of faith, we have something more than that. We have resurrection living, which is bouncing back with the risen Christ, not just a character and development of a personal style but with the Christ who is alive, is able to experience life with confidence, with the joy of knowing the positive nature of faith. And so, this is an encouragement about this Easter season for you and I. Pretty soon it will be Pentecost and the growth of the church through the Holy Spirit, but this Easter season is a time of getting back to some of the basics about the resurrection and the life of Jesus Christ in our life. Last week, Pastor Chuck talked about the truth and preached about the truth of doubt. I just wanted to let you know how I understand that. Thomas was known as the doubter, right? You know that he challenged directly that he would not believe unless he saw clearly the risen Lord, and so, I used to be very nervous about Thomas until I joined a church with Debbie many years ago in Omaha. It was called Saint Thomas. The monthly newsletter was called “The Builder.” I remember asking the pastor, “What’s up with the name?” He asked me a question, he says, as a pastor can do, “You don’t know the whole story, do you?” “I don’t; what is it?” He said, “Well, after Thomas had every doubt answered, when he asked his questions and received, by the grace of God, the direct living proof of the resurrection, he became known as The Builder. In fact, he was one of the greatest missionaries ever. In fact, his church (He went all the way to India to be a missionary.) still exists – thousands of years later.” I had no idea. So, my point to you is, as you doubt, doubt in a way that allows you to understand the truth. Ask your questions, but the truth is that Jesus Christ is alive and let you and I be part of the building team of this absolutely fabulous message.

The risen Jesus here in these message speaks of food, and I was just going to tease you, I don’t know why I’m so excited, but this phrase, when Jesus says this, “Come and have breakfast.” really excites me about resurrection living. And, about fish, I just wanted to mention just a little joke, being back in the Midwest, I kind of reestablished with my South Dakota relatives, and I don’t know if you know this, for you who are not Norwegian or Swedish, you can tell the difference. A Norwegian say this word like this: “lute-a-fisk”, OK? There’s that. If you’re a Swede, you say, “lute fisk”. That’s how you can tell. These are very important issues back in the Midwest. I have no idea how the Finnish say anything, so I won’t even try that, but I just thought it was so funny about fish, and I was just looking up about lutefisk, and, did you know, in Wisconsin (This is absolutely delightful.) the “Wisconsin’s Employees Right to Know Law”, which must be an employment document, specifically exempts lutefisk in defining toxic substances. So, it’s exempted. I just want to let you know. When we hear this fish, we continue

with this resurrection living. It really is just an amazing gift to be alive, isn't it? When I come back from my father's funeral, I just feel, obviously my heart broken and broken open in a way to respond to my father's love, but to be with you - the joy of proclaiming this message.

Christians used to be known, before they were called Christians, as people of the way. And that was in the first lesson that Terri read so beautifully, this to the people of the way, belonging to the way. This understanding is the encounter with the living God, and so I wanted to speak of resurrection living, more than being resilient, is this ability for double growth. And what I mean by that in this beautiful story, you can see that Saul, who we later know as Paul, goes through a tremendous upheaval in his life. He's on a mission, he's clearly doing what he believes is right, and then he gets a come-uppance, he gets an absolute epiphany, and he is in absolute need. Yet, at the same time, Ananias has a similar dynamic of growth, because he had heard of Saul, and so when God comes to him and says, "You need to minister to him," and he says, "I've heard about this person. This does not seem right to me." but the Lord says, "He is an instrument whom I have chosen." I love it - that both took a risk, Saul in being open to the risen Christ and Ananias. And I just pray for our congregation to be a place of encouragement like this. What I mean by that is that many of us are going through challenges in our life, and we may be called something different, for example, patient or surviving spouse or some other name to describe, perhaps sometimes being labelled with a disease and any of these labels can jolt our life and yet, at the same time, we have an opportunity to encourage one another. And I just love the word that Ananias used. His first word to Saul, even in his fear, was brother. Brother, sister, we are in this together. May our congregation be a part of resurrection living where anyone is invited, in the transitions of life, to experience it deeply and that you and I, as we support each other, call each other brother and sister, and to be an instrument of God's fantastic growth. Remember Saul's misguided actions, God used them beautifully, that personality that he had to go after it was a fantastic growth, but I also give thanks to God for Ananias' growth to minister in the name of Christians brotherhood and sisterhood.

The second lesson almost seems like, why is that in there? But, resurrection living is more than just being resilient, it is worshipping and enjoying worship. That is the hallmark of a resurrection church, of a church that understands the living God, the joy of worship. And so, these beautiful words here from Revelation's text, "Worthy is the Lamb." and the beauty, this understanding that we bring and exhibit a piece of heaven when we worship together. It gives me great joy to think of my dad singing in the heavenly chorus, the myriad of myriad and that we here approximate that in our own earthly voices, that this is a place of heaven's in-breaking. It is so important for us to enjoy worship.

I look forward to the summer, to join with you. I have an idea to bring communion to more, not just once a month but bring that more in line with a weekly celebration. I'm old enough to remember when it used to be something very special to have communion once a month. That comes from the old way which was there weren't a lot of pastors. It used to be may once very month, once every 3 months, once every 6 months, but we've got enough pastors, so that's not the issue. And I also remember growing up that you didn't want to be like a Roman Catholic, friends. I remember that. I've grown up with that, but the joy of being in a place of word and sacrament, and I encourage you, I would love for our church to experience more baptisms. My little joke to you is this, if I ask you "Are all your friends baptized?", and you say, "Yes, Pastor." then I'm going to say to you, "Make some new friends." OK? Get out there. We have an opportunity for our church to be a place of tremendous encouragement and, along with the word and sacrament, just the role that we play here. Our greeters, and you and I know that everyone is a greeter in our own way, the person next to us that we greet with warmth, but the ushers

and the communion and testimonies. I'm looking forward to hearing your testimonies more and the temple talks and our prayer times together. A resurrection-living church is one that enjoys worship, and I give thanks to God for all of the opportunities in which we are able to do that.

So we come to the Gospel message itself, and this message is one of, to me, tremendous joy, because resurrection living is God is absolutely relentless in reaching out to you and to I. This understanding of the Sea of Tiberius or Galilean Lake, the Sea of Galilee, a beautiful lake, it's a tender, tender story, and in this 2 themes come to me. One is this understanding of redemption. You know the story of Peter. How many times did he deny Christ? Three? And you see the rhythm here, that as Jesus comes to him and asks this question, but it's phrased in this way, "Do you love me more than these?" I've been pondering that, because that's really interesting Greek, because then "these" means what was preceding that. Does that mean more than food, the bread and the fish that were served? Or, does it mean the other apostles? Or, does it mean his boat and the net, his livelihood? Or does it mean just the beauty of the area? I love how it's purposefully vague, because you and I have something that conflicts with our love for Jesus, that we may put our faith and confidence in, but Jesus is absolutely after you and me, relentlessly offering love to encourage one another, to trust Jesus. Resurrection living is having a simple lead, simple and profound lead, Jesus Christ as our Lord.

This understanding opens up another piece. The word "love" in the English language, other languages have many more words for "love", and so this first two times that Jesus asks, He's really asking a word, "agapos" or "agape." Perhaps you've heard of that, but that's a love that represents almost Christ living through the believer. It's an action word, do you love me? But the way Peter answered back was saying I love you like a dear friend, like an emotional word, and so there was this kind of give and take, which is they're not on the same wavelength, but Jesus, finally, the third time he uses it, he uses that word. It's like philanthropy or like Philadelphia, City of Brotherly Love, he asks it "Do you love me?" in a deep way and the answer, of course, is "Yes." The other thing that hit me on this is that the encouragement for all of us, but especially for pastors, if you look at the verb tenses feed my lambs, tend or shepherd my sheep, and then, feed my sheep, that hit me again, coming back enthused to be with you, is that I should be 2/3 feeding you, right? The joy of preaching, the joy of Bible studies, the joy of community service, the joy, and only a third on administration and on shepherding, and this a joy to me because the living word is one in which we are lifted up so beautifully.

Last and not least, I wanted to say that the last part of this Gospel message struck me, of course with my dad's passing and the funeral, this line that you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt, but as you got older, they'll fasten a belt around you, and my dad needed that to get up. Perhaps you've had loved ones or perhaps experienced it yourself, to help lift you and to guide you and so, it just struck me this way, this incredible gift that life is. Don't put things off. A resurrection church is one that's active and engaged into life itself. Ninety-six times the bell was tolled for my dad's life, and I promised to myself that I wasn't going to count 96 times to see if the organist got it right. I wanted to step back, and so what I started with is 1923, and every time I heard, I was just thinking through the years, the 20s and the 30s and the 40s and this tremendous thing and then it was almost abrupt that when all of a sudden it became silent. All 96 have gone and it became quiet to me, and it just reminded me of the importance of life itself. We will not put off what the Lord wants us to do. We will be active, engaged in the joy of worship, and the engagement of going deeper, and the engagement in our own community. Life is precious. And, in this, I was struck by this memory that as I heard the silence, I could almost hear my dad singing with the heavenly choir, "Worthy is the lamb." Resurrection living is worshipping the

living God, the God of eternity, the God of heaven and earth, and so it's so much more than being resilient. It is the life everlasting. Amen.