

Rev. David R. Solum  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Easter  
April 24, 2020  
Immanuel Lutheran, Michigan City  
1 Peter 1:17-25; Luke 24:13-35

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Do you know why the disciples on the Emmaus road were so downcast and bereft of any joy? They thought that death spelled defeat. In their mind there was nothing worse than dying. Death was all that mattered and thus, when their Lord died, they lost all hope.

One of the dangers that we Christians must be especially careful not to fall into, especially during this stay-at-home mandate and shutdown of community as we know it, is the thought that death is to be avoided at all costs. There are things worse than death. Worse than death is not having lived. Worse than death is not having loved and been loved. Worse than death is a life without beauty, liberty, truth, love, faith, and the God from whom all these things come. That's why so many people have given their lives for these things. There's a reason why, for example, we dread the possibility of living the rest of our lives in a hospital bed on life support. Life is more than just brain waves and breathing air.

When my Grandfather Solum was well into his 90's, he continued to clean out his gutters, climbed ladders, worked out in his shed, and so forth. We all began to worry about him because we knew it would only be a matter of time before he was injured. And when he was in his upper 90s and still living in his house, we worried that some accident could easily happen and he would die there. Family members tried to get him to go into a nursing home for his own safety, but to

no avail. He wanted to live in the comfort of his own home and was content to die there. And, he did. But during that time when we were hoping he'd go into a nursing home, I thought, "What's the worst that could happen? Grandpa will have an accident at home and die at a ripe old age. Why crush his spirit? Longer life isn't necessarily better." Of course, there was more to consider than that, like the social interactions possible in a nursing home and perhaps Grandpa would've enjoyed it had he tried it out. But the point is, life isn't just about breathing or living longer.

I know that there are folks in nursing homes right now that would rather die than go without pastoral care and visits with their families. Now, don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying that there should be no precautions taken or closures of nursing homes right now to the general public. I do, though, firmly believe that every dying person should be given the dignity to have close family present and their pastor to commend them to the Lord, and that can be with whatever safety precautions need to be taken first. And I believe that pastoral care should not be shut off from anyone. What is worse...dying of despair or dying of sickness? What is worse, living longer and suffering hell or living a shorter life and enjoying eternity in heaven?

We do need to remind ourselves, as our nation begins to open up, that life is never without risks. I risked my life and the lives of others by getting behind the wheel this morning to drive to church. I took a risk a couple days ago when I rode bikes with my children on the street, when, although I teach them the best I can about safety on the road and watch them carefully, children can still be oblivious to cars and dangers and tear across the road without thinking and before I can get to them. I took a risk buying chickens a few weeks ago, when chickens can spread

diseases. My wife will be taking a risk giving birth to our child in November. We all risk death every day. But we weigh the risks with the benefits. Life would not be worth living if we barred ourselves forever in our homes with padded walls and never saw the light of day.

What if we never find a vaccine for covid-19? Or what if, right after this disease passes another one comes right on its tail? Will we stay shut down forever in our homes so that we can escape death? Or will we live? Will we love and embrace one another and commune together? To be clear, I am not advocating careless abandon. We should not test God who has sent this virus and we should respect our governing authorities which God gave us. We should protect life wherever we can, which might mean staying at home for a time for many people. But safety is not our number one concern. Living in Christ and loving our neighbor is. That's number one. And we should risk everything for it. Without it, life is just a breath and we are nothing more than dust.

Peter in our epistle reading reminds us that "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." Every human being will die. The question is, "How will we live?" Peter reminded his hearers that they were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from their forefathers. That is, their forefathers were concentrated on death, which is futile. There are two sides to the same coin. On the one hand, some people believe in absolute freedom to do whatever they like and live recklessly, without concern for themselves and others. The thought is, you only live once, therefore I'll indulge in whatever pleasures I want. But this is a concentration on death, not life. It is the belief that death ends everything, thus death controls how I act now. Likewise, on the

other side of the coin, you have people afraid to take any risk whatsoever. Because they fear disease, accidents, rejection, suffering, injury, and so forth, they live miserably and are no good to anyone. Death controls them also.

But Peter reminds us that we were ransomed from death by the death of our Lord. None of the things of this dying world could save us, not gold or silver, not all our best safety measures, but only the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Now, Jesus, in going to the cross, put His life and the lives of those around Him in danger. That's why the disciples had to hide behind locked doors. But the benefits far outweighed the risk. There are things in life worth dying for. In Christ's death we have a life worth living. It is a life eternally free from the burden of guilt, from the fear of death and the devil, and from whatever might harm us. We live for life, not for death. We love with God's love and share the beauty and joy of His gifts with everyone around us. And we die, knowing that death is not the end and does not get the better of us. Rather, it leads to eternal life with Christ. We've been reborn, not of a perishable seed, but imperishable. The Word of the Lord endures forever. And that Word was spoken over us and entered us in our baptism. Because of this, now, to die is gain and to live is Christ. We rejoice either way.

And to ensure that death never gets the best of us or keeps us from living, Christ gathers us together into one communion and feeds us with the medicine of immortality, His holy, precious body and blood which paid for our salvation. There is a reason why, although we have cancelled all public weekend services and all activities, I have always offered communion upon appointment and why our little group today is celebrating communion and why our weekend communion services will not remain cancelled for too long. The benefits far outweigh the risk.

We have taken all kinds of safety precautions to prevent the spread of disease and will continue to do so. Can I give a 100% guarantee that no one, even with all our sanitizing and social distancing, will get sick? No. No one can promise that anywhere, at the grocery store or gas station or restaurant drive thru. But there are some risks well worth taking and even dying for. Otherwise, what good were all the Christian martyrs? Or what about the families who under the Soviet Union risked the lives of their children and friends and neighbors by going to church? And there are people today who every week risk far more than we do by gathering to receive the sacrament. Consider the benefits! Christ was made known to the Emmaus disciples in the breaking of the bread. Is there anything more essential? The promise of forgiveness and life is for you and your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord calls. With Christ's very body and blood coursing through our veins, what can sickness or death do to us? Instead we are rescued from sin, the cause of sickness and death, and given the power to live and love and serve with Christ and by His Holy Spirit and the whole time under the omnipotent hand of our heavenly Father, who gives us His eternal kingdom within which we are surrounded by the heavenly host, guarded by angels, showered with grace and mercy for all our needs, and delivered from evil.

God raised Jesus Christ from the dead! And God will raise all who believe in Him to eternal life. Our faith and hope and life is in Jesus Christ.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!