

2013 Life Sunday Sermon

Text: 1 Corinthians 15: 20-22

Theme: In Christ Shall All Be Made Alive

Rev. Dr. Richard Eyer, Director Emeritus, Concordia Bioethics Institute

A little girl came to her mother one day and said to her, "I'm afraid of what it means to live forever." She had been thinking about her mother's earlier answer to the little girl's question, "What happens when I die?" But her mother's answer in saying that she will be with Jesus forever had given rise to another fear... the fear of the unknown, the word "forever." There is no way to get around the fact that death opens fears that are not easily satisfied with explanations. In fact, it is not ultimately in explanations, but in relationships that we find comfort. This little girl's comfort will come from her mother's waiting arms when she is afraid, just as our comfort in the face of death comes finally from our Savior's waiting arms when we must face our own death. The promise is, "[A]s in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (v. 22). There is fear in dying, but there is comfort in Christ!

There is fear in dying. "What happens when I die?" For those who do not know the truth found only in Christ, imaginary answers come to mind. Some simply deny that death is the end. Unwilling to believe that "in Adam all die" some propose there is a life-force within us that continues "out there" in the universe, somewhere in some form after we die. Even reincarnation as a spirituality seems to be making a comeback. Additionally, a sacred environmentalism seems to offer a spirituality that identifies with creation as the never-ending existence that will never die. All such invented theories of afterlife are mere fantasies with no reality attached to them. Those who deny Christ never consider the reality of an afterlife in Hell. There is real fear in dying, and the only real comfort in the face of death is found in relationship with God in Jesus the Christ. He is real. He suffered and died a real death. He rose from the dead and was seen and touched

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and visibly rose into heaven. There is no fantasy in Him. The focus of our faith is on Him. All ideas of what heaven will be like, for the moment, are ultimately beside the point. It is the Lord who is our focus and our comfort. We will be with the Lord. Our comfort and our focus is on our relationship with Him, not on our curiosity about an afterlife.

There is comfort in the face of death only in Christ. However, we are accustomed to finding our comfort in this life in material things and in activities rather than in the Lord. When we are fearful we try to distract ourselves rather than being attentive to the Lord. When we are worried we immerse ourselves in doing things that really have very little importance except to distract us. In the face of overwhelming troubles some become desperate. They try to take control over death by acting out against life, and ultimately against God, in committing suicide. More and more suicide is being praised as an act of courage when it is actually an act of a coward who refuses to face life head on in faith. This kind of acting out against death, rather than trusting in Christ, is what assisted suicide and euthanasia is all about. When life in times of illness becomes unbearable, rather than turn to Christ who bears our burdens with us, some turn inwardly to their own sinful nature and take charge of life and death without God. Others, still young and healthy, but acting out against fear and frustration over an unwanted pregnancy, take matters into their own hands and choose abortion and kill, not only the child, but a part of themselves until they find forgiveness and new life in Christ.

But all attempts to take charge of death in these ways are attempts to take death out of the hands of God who has already taken charge of death and overcome it in Christ

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on the cross. We don't need to take charge of death; Christ has given us the victory over it. In facing death, whether our own or another's, the only real and lasting comfort is in our relationship with God in Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ we come into the presence of God in the midst of all of this world's threats and fears knowing that although, "in Adam, all die! . . . in Christ, shall all be made alive!"

We don't have to wait until we die to be made alive in Christ. We have already been made alive in Christ here and now. Death has no power over us. In baptism the old Adam in us was killed and has no eternal power over us. That doesn't mean that all is well here on earth for us. We are surrounded by death and we grieve, but we have eternal life alive in us and in our loved ones in Christ now and we live it with them. We are renewed every day as we read the Word of God and bring our fears and needs to our Lord in prayer. The old Adam that was killed tries to live again in us, but is put to death in us every time we turn again to Christ for forgiveness and begin to relive the life that He gives us. This is why we return to worship God each week. In worship our faith is renewed and fed with the food of heaven, the body and blood of Christ. In public worship we join with brothers and sisters in Christ who occupy the pews around us to sing His praise and pray for one another as the Body of Christ in this place.

"In Christ shall all be made alive!" That is why we urgently care for others who do not yet know Christ . . . those who are hurting and dying around us in despair and fear. To those who do not know Christ we offer ourselves as Christ's presence. Through our presence and caring in Christ's name those who do not yet know Him, come to know Him in us. We are the ones who are, as Luther said, "little Christs" to others. As others

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experience our love and care they experience Christ's love and care for them. Not all will acknowledge this, but others may. Just as many rejected Christ, so many may reject us, but we come in Christ's name nevertheless as we pray for them and help them to see Christ in us. They will know Christ by our words and love for them. Where else can angry, bitter, and fearful people experience love and forgiveness when they reject us but we do not reject them? Forgiveness can be expressed when people ignore or despise us and we continue to be helpful to them. It may be that someone will respond by saying, "Why are you doing this for me when I treat you so poorly?" Try answering, "Because God loves me—and He loves you!" In Christ we are transformed in how we live for others. It is not that we do this by ourselves, but that Christ lives in us and we in Him.

Many of us have had the experience of sitting with a loved one as they were dying. It may have been for a few minutes or a matter of days or even weeks. As they lay dying it is as if we walk with them up to the gate of heaven and, in the end, hold the door for them they entered safely into the arms of Christ and we return to live our own lives once again. There is comfort in having walked someone up to the gate of heaven, but there is also sadness in not being able to walk in with the loved one just yet. We shall have to wait until our time is come, but we know that we too shall be with the Lord in all its fullness both as we live and when we die. We are living with dying and it's the only way to go! Jesus leads the way. His way is the way of the cross and empty tomb. Our way is exactly the same for we are in Him and He is in us. He has given us the victory. In Adam all die, but in Christ shall all be made alive who love and trust in Him.