

Easter Sunday – Year B – Faith Lutheran – Radcliff, KY
Based on Isaiah 25:6-9 written by Pastor Paul Horn
“Our Risen Lord will swallow up death forever!”

I recently finished reading a trilogy written by Suzanne Collins entitled *The Hunger Games*, which has now been made into a movie. The plot of this series of books goes something like this:

Panem is a futuristic totalitarian country lying in the remains of the United States. Long ago there were 13 districts, but the districts grew angry in their poverty at the wealth that the capitol of Panem had. They waged war, but the Capitol responded with a brutal nuclear attack, destroying District 13 and rendering the other districts helpless. The capitol established an annual event in remembrance of the war called the Hunger Games, a brutal series of events that reminds the districts that they are at the capitol's every whim.

The Hunger Games consist of a boy and girl between the ages of 12 and 18 being selected from each district, 24 kids in all, and are shipped off to the capitol in a process called the reaping, where they are then beautified, fattened up and interviewed before being dropped into an arena with each other. The kids fight to the death while all of Panem watches on national TV. This year will be the 74th Hunger Games. The book focuses on a family in District 12, when 12-year-old Primrose Everdeen is selected as District 12's female representative. As soon as her name is drawn, she becomes very afraid, knowing she will face certain death.

Isn't that how our lives are? Not that the government is selecting our names from a hat and forcing us to fight to the death, but every year we know that our name could be the next to be drawn. Young people don't think about it – unless a classmate dies in a car accident or the tornado sirens sound, because now they've seen what a tornado can do, or a relative suddenly dies and suddenly they're faced with their own mortality. We adults don't like to think about it but are faced with reality when we sit down with the lawyer and plan our will and establish guardianship for our children in the event that we die. We are faced with the reality of death when the obituaries carry the name of someone who is my age – and I quickly realize that death does not discriminate.

Our lesson this morning is from the book of the prophet Isaiah, chapter 25. The LORD through his prophet talks about a shroud that **enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations.**” In the next line he tells us that this veil is death... death is like a shroud that covers the whole earth because death affects all people. While we may understand the inevitability of death, you're getting nervous right now thinking, “I wish he'd talk about Easter baskets and jelly beans.”

Isn't that what we do with death, try to cover it up? The grieving widow wears a veil to cover the tears, the running mascara, the swollen, red eyes, the face full of sorrow. We use a veil to cover death - clothes have to be cut and laid over the dead body, perfumes and make up to cover up the decomposing corpse. We then cover it with a coffin or urn, flowers, pour earth over it, and place an elegant marble tombstone, all to hide death, but it does not take away its reality.

We don't like to talk about it because of what God says about death, Romans 5:12, "**Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.**" The shroud covers the world... We discussed this Friday night in the *Tenebrae* service - paradise in Eden was lost because Adam and Eve disobeyed God's direct order. They lost the right relationship with God. They lost their immortality. They lost life. Because of their sin, sin has come to all people. And because all are infected with this disease of sin in themselves all will die. How do you explain miscarriages and stillbirths, or young people being cut off in the prime of their lives, how do we explain our general contractor's 47-year-old brother-in-law suddenly dying this past weekend, leaving behind his wife and four children? It's sin! Death comes to all people because all sinned – that makes you and me uncomfortable because I am included in the word *all* – he means me.

Maybe you've accepted this truth from God's Word. Maybe you fully understand the severity of your sins and you know death is coming. And it's not so much death you fear, but you're afraid of dying. How am I going to die? Will I suffer, or will I pass peacefully in my sleep? The bottom line is: it doesn't matter. The fact that we fear how we're going to die is a sin, because it exhibits a lack of trust in God. For that one "simple" sin, God says I must die. Just as the citizens of Panem were punished for their rebellion against the capital and were forced to send their sons and daughters to die, so God says we must be punished for our rebellion against him. We must die.

In *The Hunger Games* book Primrose Everdeen's name was plucked from the bowl full of names of young girls. She is dragged up to the stage by armed guards to be presented as the female representative from District 12. When suddenly her 16-year-old sister, Katniss, jumps out of the crowds and says, "Stop! I volunteer!" knowing full well that she could die in the arena. So great is her love for her sister, that she wants to spare her the horrors of the arena, to spare her sister from certain death. How much greater is your Savior's love for you, that he steps forward and presents himself as the substitute for you and for me, "I volunteer for them," he says. We have one who went into the arena and faced the horror of our sins, who faced with death itself and allowed death to take his life in our place - but he was victorious over our sins. By his death he took away our sin and our punishment. You will not be punished for your sins, for God penalized his Son in our place.

But he is not dragged out of the arena as a dead man, as the loser. Jesus, the Son of God rises again to be the victor. Before he died, Jesus told his disciples a story from their Sunday school lessons, the story about Jonah and the big fish. He said, "Just as Jonah was in the belly of a great fish for 3 days, so also the Son of Man will be in the belly of the earth for three days, and then he will rise again." Just as the great fish had to vomit Jonah out onto dry land, the grave had to vomit up Jesus on Easter Sunday morning. The tomb could not contain Jesus' body, because he used his power to rouse his slumbering body from death to rise and live again.

This is what the LORD through Isaiah was speaking about. In vs7-8 he said, "**[The LORD] will destroy the shroud and the sheet that covers all nations, he will swallow up death forever.**" Death, the great swallower of human lives, will itself be swallowed up forever. Even though death will devour us, Jesus removed death's power to keep us in the stomach of the earth. Through his resurrection Jesus swallowed up death forever. By your baptism, you are connected to Jesus' resurrection. Because he lives, you too will live. Because he rose,

you too will rise from your grave. Death will have to give us up from our graves because it holds no power over you and me.

This promise comforts us in death. In vs8 he promises, **“The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears.”** The disciples and the women thought they would never see Jesus again. That’s why the women went to anoint his dead body with spices on Sunday morning and wondered, “Who will roll the stone away from the tomb?” But their tears of sadness soon turned to tears of gladness and rejoicing when the angels said to them, **“Don’t be alarmed! He is not here! He is risen, just as he said!”** Jesus promised his followers he would rise. He proved it by appearing to them after his resurrection.

When a loved one dies, we cry and our hearts break. But Jesus’ resurrection dries our tears. For a day is coming when there will be no more tears, no more veils to hide the sorrow, no more coffins to hide dead bodies. For there in heaven you will live forever. Death is not the end for you or your loved one, because those who trust his promise and believe in his resurrection, are with him now. You will see them again!

But wait, it gets better! When a young boy or girl won the Hunger Games, they were treated to a life of luxury, they were given a mansion to live in, provided with a generous lifetime supply of food, were treated as celebrities. God has something better in store for you. First: no more death, nor more sickness, no more tears or sorrow. In Isaiah vs6 he describes a wedding banquet, **“On this mountain (that is heaven) the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best meats and the finest of wines.”** You think that Emeril, Wolfgang Puck or Jasper White are good chefs? How about having God prepare and serve your dinner? There you are, seated at the banquet table with all the believers, and sitting at the head of the table, the Lamb of God who earned it for you, who brought you safely there.

Vs9 **“In that day,”** Isaiah says, the day Christ comes to bring us home to the heavenly mansions, In that day we will say, **“Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.”** There is no fear in death. We already what’s going to happen. God has just told us. We will be confident in death, singing and praising God, because we trusted in him to save us, we trusted in his Son Jesus to save, and he has and he does and he will.

In the book *The Hunger Games*, if your name was picked, you knew you were going to die. When a young girl or boy was selected to go to the arena the announcer would say, “May the odds be ever in your favor!” We never have to wonder if the odds are in our favor or against us! We have Jesus, the living and breathing Savior of the world. We have Jesus, who lives no more to die. We have hope, hope that is certain and sure, we know that death is not the end of us. We will all rise as victors, not because of our efforts, but because Jesus lives and has swallowed up death forever.

For Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen!