**Isaiah 25:6-9** April 21, 2019

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Easter Sunday

*Isaiah 25:6On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare*

*a feast of rich food for all peoples,*

*a banquet of aged wine—*

*the best of meats and the finest of wines.*

*7On this mountain he will destroy*

*the shroud that enfolds all peoples,*

*the sheet that covers all nations;*

*8he will swallow up death forever.*

*The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears*

*from all faces;*

*he will remove the disgrace of his people*

*from all the earth.*

*The Lord has spoken.*

*9In that day they 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.”*

Dear Friends in Jesus Christ, the Firstborn from the Dead,

So what did you think of that first choir song? I think I saw a few of you tapping your toes. My daughter (she’s in the choir), the other night she said it sounded like a show tune—and she thought that was good thing! A pastor’s daughter! Me, I come from good old Lutheran stock. We were Lutheran before there was Luther—which might be a slight exaggeration. We don’t go in for show tunes. We like solid, low to the ground songs, like “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”, except in a minor key just to be sure no one has too much fun. But you know what, I think the people who dug through all the piles of music to find that one song did a great job. Thank you Wilma and Louise. (You didn’t know that, did you. A choir doesn’t just get up there and sing. They don’t even just come in here and practice. Someone has mine for gems like that.) They made a fine choice—even if some of you were tapping your toes.

They made a fine choice because God’s word for today is full of the same kind of exuberant energy. Our Bible reading directs us forward to heaven. And whenever the Bible starts talking about heaven, it gets exuberant. It says heaven isn’t going to be a board room meeting or a classroom lecture. God himself tells us, ***“The Lord Almighty will prepare a feast!”*** Couldn’t you imagine that choir song at a feast?! I could!

You know what feasts are, right. You say, “Sure, pastor, I know what a feast is.” We think we do, but when you think about it, real feasts don’t come along that often. Sometimes they happen at a wedding—if the couple happens to have money or belong to families that have money. Maybe if you are in the upper echelon at a fairly large company, maybe you get something close to a feast at your Christmas party at work. But feasts are few and far between – even in our days of wealth compared to the general poverty of Bible times. I would bet that most of us can count on one hand the times that we have been guests at a real genuine feast, where they put out the best meat, gourmet dishes, and expensive wine and tell you to take whatever you want, to drink whatever you want and say, “Don’t worry about the cost. It’s on us.” They aren’t telling you you can take an extra hamburger off the grill. You can have the steak *and* the shrimp and even a dollop of caviar. As I say this, maybe you are sort embarrassed as you realize, “You know, I’ve never actually been to a feast. Not a *feast*.” That’s ok. I’m not sure I have been either. But you will be. You will one day eat at…

**The Feast of Life—Death’s Funeral**

Chapter 25 of Isaiah’s prophecy tells us where and when that feast will take place. It says, ***“On this mountain.”*** ***“On this mountain”*** refers to what came before, in chapter 24. ***“On this mountain”*** is what we commonly call heaven. It is talking about that time and place beyond the grave, when after our death we are in God’s presence for eternity.

Isaiah tells people that there will be great celebration at this heavenly feast because, ***“On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations.”*** What in the world is he talking about: ***“the shroud that enfolds all people, the sheet that covers all nations”***?

What is like a sheet that covers every person on this earth? What is like a “wet blanket” on humanity? I think you know. There is only one thing that must happen to every single human being. And right after life has ceased the first responders, maybe the medical personnel pull the sheet over the deceased’s face. Almost as soon as we can, we cover them up. If the first responders didn’t, we would. It is instinct.

Death is the shroud over all of humanity. Some more pessimistic voices have said that we start dying the moment we are born. There’s truth in that. Nothing is as certain in life as life’s end. Nothing.

Oh, we spend millions to avoid death. But the best we are doing is putting it off a few short years, and sometimes our money can’t even do that. The certainty of death affects and infects all that we do. We work, but one day all we have worked for will be passed on to others who will do who-knows-what with it. If we try to drown out the drumbeat of death with partying and excess, we are just pushing the gas pedal to the floor. You can avoid the subject, but you can’t avoid death.

If you want a depressing account of this, read the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. It’s eleven pages in my Bible. You can read it in an hour or less. It is the story of a wise, hard-working, and obscenely wealthy man who found out that it was all meaningless. No matter what path he took in life, the giant red “X” appeared on his screen complete with buzzer sound. He would die, and all he had lived for would be left to others who would squander it. Even after using his wealth and power for the good of mankind, oppression and injustice would continue.

If you decide instead to make relationships, rather than things, your focus that works for a while, until they start passing away. How many people have you laughed with, shared a meal with, worked with, respected and earned their respect, who no longer walk this earth? Talk to someone in their 90s and one of the great sorrows they feel, God bless them, is the loneliness of being the last one on death’s calling list.

Death will affect everyone. Money can keep you out of prison, give you better health care, make life comfortable. Power can make you the boss of other people’s lives, make you feel like you are above the troubles that afflict the common man. Pleasure, for a moment, can help you forget that life is short and often painful. But none of it steers clear of death. Show me the most powerful man in the world. In two decades I will show you a tomb. Show me the wealthiest man in the world. In two decades come with me to his funeral. Show me someone who manages to drown himself in happiness every moment of life and the actuarials tell us that you will find someone with a shorter life span than the other two guys!

And if you should say, “Okay. I won’t live for power, wealth or pleasure.” That won’t help either. Living an altruistic life does not alter the truth that death is ***“the shroud that enfolds all people, the sheet that covers all nations.”*** Every single one.

Which is what had the disciples depressed that Sunday morning after Jesus’ death. They knew the script. Someone dies. You bury them. Maybe you try to pretty up the whole scene with embalming spices and perfumes, but death is death. Even though Jesus had told them he would rise from the dead, they just didn’t see how that could happen. People live and then they die, and if there was one sure thing about Jesus’ crucifixion, it was that he had died! They saw it. Everyone saw it.

As our Gospel reading told us, They should have trusted Jesus. He is risen!

Many of you were here last week on Palm Sunday when we cheered Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem. And here you are on Easter Sunday when we again cheerfully celebrate another day. It’s just one big happy time of year isn’t it? But if you didn’t get here during the week, you missed something! Because in order to have Easter you have to have Good Friday. If you want to stop a disease, you need to stop the cause. In order to defeat death, Jesus had to defeat the cause of death. What caused death? God did not design death into this world when he created it. But it was the human choice, sin, that caused death. Because humanity chose and continues to choose sin, death is the result. As the Scriptures say, *“The wages of sin is death.”* And in order for Jesus to defeat death for us, he had to defeat the cause of death, namely sin. Without Good Friday there could be no Easter. And I don’t mean that Jesus couldn’t rise from the dead unless he first died. Jesus first had to die and conquer sin so that he could conquer sin’s result, death, for us. If Jesus had not paid for our sin on Good Friday, he could not guarantee us eternal life on Easter.

His death and resurrection tell us that the Lord Almighty ***“will swallow up death forever.”*** Easter is a day to proclaim that truth. For while we know that death will come to each of us (unless Christ comes back to judge this earth sooner) death will have only a momentary victory. Christ is proof. He rose from the dead after his death to show to us that through faith in him we will one day rise from the dead. We know that every passing of a Christ-trusting Christian is only a uncomfortably snug doorway leading to eternal life.

With the demise of death, ***“The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth.”*** All sources of grief and sorrow will disappear. It will be an eternal springtime where life has only potential, not a termination. It will indeed be ***“a feast of rich food for all people, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.”*** What a feast. What joy!

Many of us have never actually been to a feast. Maybe the closest thing to it was this: Do you remember going to a restaurant as a family and asking dad, “How much can we spend?” You asked, because you knew there were limits and you wanted to stop the disappointment before it started. So you said, “How much can we spend?” There was the one time dad said, “Order whatever you want” and you were so excited. Really? Your mind went crazy with the possibilities. Your dopamine levels were off the charts. Anything?! Well, you knew there actually were still limits. You probably wouldn’t get away with an appetizer, steak and shrimp, desert and a large chocolate shake. But in the feast of heaven you will.

When you know someone who does that for you, who enjoys providing what you need and even what you want, you treasure that person. When you know that they love to see you smile because they just love to see you smile, and there is not a shadow of condescension in their generosity, you treasure them.

If our eternity is such a feast, if He died and rose again so that that feast can be our eternal reality, then truly we should say what they said in the last verse of our reading, ***“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.”*** He is our God. He is the be-all and end-all of life. We rejoice in him. We speak about him. Even as he does what will save us, we reciprocate – because that’s what friendship is. We do what pleases him. We make him God in our lives. We bow down to him. We worship him. We re-arrange our lives to live for him even as he lives for us.

When you do that, I know that you will be blessed. How will you be blessed? I don’t know. That’s for God to decide and bless. But I have seen it. People who look at Christ on Easter morning and say, ***“Surely this is our God”***, you can see it in their eyes. They can already hear the choir singing and smell God cooking up **The Feast of Eternal Life.** Amen.