

Summer sermon series on the 3rd Article of the Creed – August 1, 2010 – Faith Lutheran Church
Based on Luke 16:19-31; Job 19:25-27 - Pastor Paul Horn

Say with confidence, “I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.”

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! But before he could rise, Jesus had to allow death to close his eyes.

Listen to this quote from Martin Luther, “If you look at the matter rightly, death is the sphere in which the entire world moves. Nothing but pictures and works of death! Till Judgment Day, life is a constant and daily journey toward death. One after another dies, and the living must merely engage in the miserable business of carrying one another to the grave. We bring death into the world with us, bear it and drag it about with us from the moment of our birth, and all of us are traveling the same road together. The only difference is that one precedes another or is carried out before another, while the others must follow him until the turn of the last one comes. And there is no difference, nor can help against death be had from any creature. Death rules over all and irresistibly sweeps all away.” (*Luther’s Works* 11:1671, St. Louis edition)

What is it? Are you not looking forward to the next 15 minutes with great joy and excitement after that great quote from the good doctor? Or are you uncomfortable because I’m about to preach about another sermon about death? Why does the topic of death make you uncomfortable?

Because death means sadness, grief and pain; a sense of loss; fear - not knowing when it will happen or how it will happen. It is good for us as Christians to talk about death. The more we know about it, the less grief and sadness that is connected to it and the less we fear it.

Today we will explore the final part of our summer sermon series on the 3rd Article of the Creed: **I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.**

God’s Word tells us that every person on earth will experience death. Except Enoch and Elijah who were taken to heaven without seeing death, and those who are alive when Christ returns. The Bible also tells us that all will be present for the Last Day. Scripture tells us that death and the Last Day will be very different experiences for the unbeliever and the believer. Before we talk about the resurrection and the Last Day, we need to answer the question, “Why is there death in the world?”

Because in the beginning, God created the human body to last forever. As we grow older, it is evident that our bodies wear out (Ecclesiastes 12:1-17), like old cars, the parts just don’t work like they used to, and we die. Why is that? God told our first parents, “**You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.**” Satan took what God had created to be a blessing and offered it as a temptation, and the human race bit. And when they disobeyed, he said to Adam, “**By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.**” (Genesis 2:16,17; 3:19) From that act of disobedience the sinful nature was born, and has lived

in every body and soul that has breathed on this earth (except the Son of God). That sinful nature is the cause of death. The sins that the sinful nature influences us to commit cause death. For God says, "**The wages of sin is death.**" (Romans 6:23). All have sinned, all deserve death. How do you explain to a parent who loses a child in miscarriage or stillbirth, as a teenager, or to a widow or widower whose spouse dies in middle age? Because God says that they were sinners, and they possessed a sinful condition for which God prescribes death. The same reason my grave stares wide-eyed waiting for me, and for you.

To which my sinful nature cries out, "No, surely not! How do I deserve this?" This offends you and me. A pastor once told me that after he had preached for a funeral, members from the church and the family approached him and said that they were offended by the sermon. They didn't like to hear the strong preaching of the law that the deceased died because of his sinful condition. They wanted to hear the good things about their deceased loved one. If pastors do not preach that the consequence of sin is death, then we are guilty of negligence with the Word of God and have no need to preach about Christ as the solution to sin and death. Pastor said, "They focused on the law and didn't listen to the good news in the sermon." Listen now to the good news.

There is comfort for us who mourn over our sinful condition, who repent daily of falling into temptation, who confess that we are not worthy to stand in God's holy presence. Comfort is found in Jesus' words to the murderer executed next to him, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

That criminal knew that he deserved to die. He knew that he was going to die. We know we will die. We know we deserve it. But we also know Christ Jesus, and we believe in him, and we stand at the foot of the cross in wonder and awe and say, "Here God has saved me from what I deserve! Here, God became my sin. Here, God became my death, and he died in my place, so that my soul will not suffer in hell forever, for Christ has done that for me already!"

Jesus said in John 5.24, "**Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.**" It is as if we have already faced death, passed through it and entered into heaven! And so, when I face my grave, I know that my sin, Satan, hell itself, have been overcome through Christ crucified. When you face your grave, you will not look back on your past sins, you will not listen to Satan who will be whispering in your ear, "You don't deserve it!" But you will look at the cross and the empty tomb, for there is our comfort in death; eternal life. It is mine now. I trust that since Christ earned it for me, he will lead me safely there, yes, even through the dark valley of the shadow of death.

Listen to these words from the sainted Pastor C.F.W. Walther, "When Death summons us, we can... follow him confidently and say, "I shall gladly go with you. I praise God for my escape from this terrible prison. I entertain no doubt that I shall stand before the throne of a gracious God. Why? Not because I feel that way; not because I have performed good works; not because I have amended my mode of living. All these things would be sinking sand; for it is quite possible that in the hour of death feelings of gladness will forsake me. Being accustomed to rely

on the Word, I have the trusty staff which I need for support at my passage through the dark valley of death.” (*The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, p.153)

What happens then to my body when I die? In Genesis 3:19 we already heard the LORD say to Adam that to dust you will return. Whether it is cremated or lowered into the ground encased in a coffin, the body returns to dust, and very quickly after death, even the bones eventually return to dust. At death the soul separates from the body. As we discovered in our Gospel this morning from Luke 16 the soul of an unbeliever goes immediately to hell, and the soul of a believer goes immediately to heaven. There is no state of limbo for the soul.

Eventually body will be raised. In John 5 Jesus says that on the Last Day all will hear his voice and come out. Whether they believed in Jesus or not, billions of bodies will rise from the land, sea, even the cremated bodies in canisters that have been shot into space. The Apostle Paul says in 1Corinthians 15:52 that the dead will be raised imperishable, unable to die, immortal. At this resurrection of the dead on the Last Day, the soul will be reunited with the body.

This is bad news for the unbeliever. The soul will live in a body that will last forever. Those who rejected Jesus Christ as Savior will wish they could die or be destroyed, but it will not be an option. The unbeliever’s body and soul will suffer in a lake of fire. In the story of Lazarus and the rich man, even a drop of water on the tongue would be a relief, but it will not happen. There will be no end in sight, no hope for those who do not believe.

For you who believe in Jesus’ death and resurrection – the resurrection of the body on the Last Day will be very different. Your body will be raised from death and be made new. When Jesus rose from the dead, he had the same body, but it was different. It was made fit for heaven. That body still lives in heaven today and he will return in that body on the Last Day. As Job said, “He will stand upon the earth!” Your body will be just like Jesus’ body, fit to last forever in heaven (Phil 3.20,21). And it will be this body, as Job said, “I will behold him with my own eyes, I and not another!” Just as the LORD did in the beginning, we will have a body that will never wear out or die, no teeth falling out, no more arthritis, no more aching backs or knees, nor pain or sorrow or grieving, for there will be no more death.

That is why we look forward to heaven and it makes our attitude toward death more pleasant. If you’ve ever had a daughter or son who has gotten married and moved away, I’m sure that it was hard for you as the parent to say goodbye. But it might be easier as a parent if you know that your son or daughter and their spouse will be living a happy life, even though they are far away. Believers view death in the same way. It is not easy when a loved one or friend departs. There will be crying and grief. But believers know that loved ones have departed to be with Jesus and that they will join their loved one someday. We look at death as a departure to be with Jesus, which Paul says, is better by far (Phil 1.23).

When the children and teens from our church went camping two weeks ago, they had a lot of fun. Some got a little homesick. It’s understandable, living in a tent, thunder storms every night, and with the rain coming into the tent, and no mom or dad. Pastor Horn might be a nice guy to have at camp, he’s not mom or dad. We can’t even begin to compare our home here on earth in this tent (our present bodies) with the true home that is ours, where God will be watching over us

and living right there with us. That is why we will we confidently confess today and everyday, “I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” That is why everyday we will lift our eyes to heaven and say, “Come quickly Lord Jesus! Amen!”