

Song of Victory
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

“This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Every day is the day that the Lord has made. And many people quote this verse daily to remind themselves to rejoice and be glad in that day. That’s a wise thing to do. I commend this practice to everyone.

However, there are days, and then there are days. This is **the** day. This is the day of days. This is the most joyous of days. Let us rejoice and be glad in this day above all days.

This is the day that we join Christ is singing glad songs of victory. The song of victory that we sing is this, “I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord.”

On this day Christ defeated the bully who tormented us since the days of Adam.

I once heard one of my fellow pastors, Morris Mathis, tell about being bullied as a boy. There was a huge, overdeveloped kid in his class who took delight in making life miserable for the others kids. And it seemed that he took a special delight in picking on Morris.

This was in the day before teachers and administrators recognized how dangerous bullying is. Today if a student is being bullied, he or she is encouraged to report it and the school takes care of it. Not so in the old days. It was up to you to take care of yourself.

Well, poor Morris spent his days constantly watching out for this bully. He lived in constant fear of being hurt or humiliated by him. Eventually Morris’ father, who was also a minister, was moved. They left the community and Morris forgot about the bully who had tormented him for so long.

Then, one day Morris was reading the newspaper. He saw something that caught his eye. It was the name of the bully. He read the article. This fellow had been tried and convicted of assault and battery and was sentenced to several years in the state penitentiary. Morris says that his reaction was to jump up and say “Yes!” and he danced for joy. The bully who had tormented him for so long had been defeated.

That’s part of why we celebrate so joyfully on Easter Sunday. The bully who tormented us for so long has been defeated.

Since Adam sinned and fell under the curse, death has bullied us and caused terrible misery and sorrow. The writer of Ecclesiastes expressed it powerfully, when he said that everything we may accomplish in life is in vain, because in the end we all die. The rich and the poor all die. The famous and the infamous all have the same end. The righteous and the unrighteous lie together in corruption in the end. The wise may live a little longer than the foolish, but cannot escape death. The strong have no more control at the end than the weak. Those who do great deeds and those who do nothing all end up in the same place. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, says the teacher of wisdom. His final advice is to simply enjoy the simple pleasures of each day and try not to think about the fact that you are one day closer to the end of your existence.

That's easier for some people than for others. I knew a fellow who had some pretty amazing adventures in World War II. His wife told him to ask him about the time he fell out of an airplane without a parachute. So, the next time I saw him I said, "Dorothy told me to ask you about falling out of an airplane without a parachute." He said, "Oh yeah. Well, I was in a bomber. I was back there in the bomb bay when they opened it up to drop the bombs. I was watching the bombs drop. It was pretty fascinating. Well, I leaned over to get a good look and I went too far. I fell out of the airplane." I said, "Jack, what happened? Did you fall to your death?" He said, "Obviously not. No, a big, old sergeant was back there. When he saw what was happening, he reached out and caught my belt. He was strong enough and I was small enough he was able to pull me back in. Before he could let go of me, my belt broke and I fell to the floor of the airplane." Well, I have a fear of heights. Just listening to this story made me dizzy and sick at my stomach. I said, "Jack, how could you be so careless that you would fall out of an airplane?" He said, "I was young, and I didn't think that I would ever die."

Usually it is young people who are able to ignore death. But none of us stay young for ever. I was talking with one old man who was up in his 90's. I asked him what the secret of his long life was. He said, "I'm afraid of dying." I thought he was kidding. But the look on his face told me that he wasn't.

On this day Christ conquered death. When Christ stood up and walked out of that tomb, he changed our lives completely.

Until that day it was a foregone conclusion that no matter how hard we fought, sooner or later death would have the last word. Eventually we would have to give up and give in to the power of death. We would lie down in the dust and be no more. So, everyone's life story was a tragedy.

I had a conversation one time with a friend about what we enjoyed reading. He said, "I hate reading biographies." I asked him why that was. He said, "Because at the end of the story the main character always dies."

But all that changed on Easter Sunday. The end of our stories was rewritten on that day. Since Easter morning, death is not the end of our stories. Since Easter, in Christ we will live happily ever after. Our lives have been transformed from tragedies into songs of victory.

"This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." It is because we can rejoice and be glad on this day that we can rejoice and be glad in every other day.

One time I was talking with a parishioner who was going through some hard times. I asked her how she was doing. To my surprise, she said, "I've doing wonderfully." I asked her how that could be. She said, "Many years ago I was diagnosed with cancer. I went through many months of treatment. The odds were not good. I was afraid that all the suffering I went through would be for naught. Then, one day the doctor came in and said, 'We don't find any trace of cancer in you. You are in complete remission.' In that moment I realized I would live. I haven't had a bad day since then. No matter what happens, I think back to what I went through then, and I remember the day I was told I would live, and I celebrate. Every day is a good day."

On Easter Sunday, God spoke to us and said, "You will live."

So, we don't have any more bad days. I remember what it was like before I experienced new life in Christ. Although I was raised in the church and believed the gospel, it wasn't real to me. I believed in the resurrection of Christ, but it had nothing to do with my life. I believed in God, but God wasn't real to me. God was in heaven, and I was here struggling through life alone.

Those were dark, empty days. Some days my only consolation was that some day I would die and my misery would be ended.

Then the light of God's presence and love broke through into my life. All the things I had believed in theory became reality. The resurrection became real in my life. That was the day I came alive.

I don't have any more bad days. There are days when bad things happen. But on those days, I just remember what life was like before I experienced eternal life in Christ Jesus. And I give thanks that those days are behind me. Every day is a good day when you are alive in Christ.

Because of that day—the day of days--every day we can say, “This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

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