

4-8-2007, Easter C  
Chapelwood UMC, Lake Jackson

The Last Enemy  
1 Corinthians 15:19-26

At last, Lent is over. For six weeks we've been talking about sin and singing sad songs about the cross. At our moving Maundy Thursday service, the choir and the readers made us to feel that we were there at the cross. At the community Good Friday service, the preacher actually gathered many of the participants around the foot of the cross. The cross is central to our faith as Christians. We will not forget the cross or the price Christ paid on the cross. But we won't be talking about cross today. Today we celebrate. On Easter Sunday we don't have to talk about suffering and dying. One time I had a choir director who had the choir sing an arrangement of "The Old Rugged Cross" for the anthem on Easter Sunday. I fired him. Just kidding. But I don't want to talk about the Cross on Easter Sunday, and I sure don't want to sing about it. Today we talk about the empty tomb. Today we remind ourselves that the cross was not the end of the story. The cross did not have the last word. Death and dying are old news. Today's news is Resurrection and Eternal Life.

Death is defeated.

Death was the last enemy. Jesus had confronted evil in every other form. He had cast out demons. He had healed the sick. He had fed the hungry. He was a friend to the lonely. He forgave the guilt-stricken. He stood up to the tyrants. Every time Jesus encountered some evil which stole the goodness of life from people, he conquered it.

However, if he had conquered every other enemy of life and had not conquered the last enemy, death would still be a shadow hanging over our lives. You can live a good and happy life, but you know that each day brings you one step closer to the end of life, there is still a shadow over your life.

I did a funeral for an older woman who was a widow. After the service I was talking with her son. He was talking about how difficult this was for him. And it wasn't just losing his mother. He said, "You know, preacher, I've always thought of life as kind of like a conveyor belt, carrying you along from the beginning to the end. But I never worried too much about the end as long as there was somebody between me and the end. My mother was the last person between me and the end.

I knew what he was talking about. When my father died, my brothers and I were making some decisions about the funeral. I expressed my opinion about something, and one of my brothers said, "Whatever you decide, we'll do it. You are now the patriarch of the family." I couldn't have been more shocked if he had thrown a bucket of cold water on me. I suddenly realized that I was the oldest man in our family.

Talk about becoming aware of your mortality.

I had a member of my church who was 96 years old. He was still spry. He worked in his garden. His mind was sharp. He loved to tell stories about when he was a young man, back about 1900. He had had a good life. He had enjoyed it all. One day, as we were talking, I asked him, "After 96 years of life, what is your main impression about life?" Without missing a beat, he said, "It's too short." 96 years of life wasn't enough

for him. He still had a lot of living to do. His only regret was that he knew he would run out of time before he got to do all he wanted to do.

Jesus came to give us life and give it to us abundantly. When you walk with Jesus, life is good. Who wants to give up a good life? If you're miserable, you don't mind dying. But if you are enjoying it, it's kind of cruel to take it away from you. That would be like the boss calls one of his employees into his office and says, "I've got good news and I've got bad news. The good news is that starting next week we are giving you a sizeable raise. The bad news is that this is your notice that in two weeks your position will be terminated." I think if I were him, I'd rather not get the raise. It's easier to lose a job that doesn't pay all that well anyway than to be fired from a great paying job.

That's the position we Christians are in. In Christ we have a good life. That makes it all the harder to give it up. That's what Paul was talking about when he said, "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." If death were the end of life, we would lose the most, because we have gained the most in Christ.

However, that is not the case, because, again as Paul wrote, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died."

On Easter Sunday Christ defeated the last enemy. Christ has shown us that death is not the end of life. He showed us that God has the power to resurrect us to eternal life.

In Christ's resurrection we see our own future. Yes, we will die, just as Christ died. Death is the last enemy we will face. But just as Christ was resurrected, we will be resurrected. We will be raised to eternal life, just as Christ was raised to eternal life.

Death is the last enemy. And we will conquer death in Christ Jesus.

And what a difference that makes in the way we live now.

I was watching that old Disney movie, Swiss Family Robinson, the other night. You know, it's a story about a family that gets shipwrecked on an island in the Pacific. They turn it into a tropical paradise with a tree house and running water. I told Becky that I must be going through a midlife crisis, because the idea of living on an uninhabited island in the Pacific sounded pretty attractive. She said, "If you're going through a midlife crisis, you'll have to live to be 114 years old." She's right. I passed my opportunity to have a midlife crisis a long time ago. I've got more years behind me than I've got ahead of me. That would be discouraging if I weren't a Christian. But Easter tells us that we've got an eternity ahead of us. It doesn't matter if you are 8 months old, or 8 years old, or 18 years old, or 80 years old, we are all infants in the light of eternity. We have just begun to live. "When we've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun."

The last enemy will be destroyed. We know that. The battle has been won. So, let us live as winners. We ought to live fully and joyfully and fearlessly.

Some people live as if they are walking through a desert with only a canteen of water with him. They only take small sips of life, because they don't want to run out too soon. They are never really satisfied. They only drink enough to be able to keep walking as long and as far as they can before they finally run out, knowing that eventually they will run out. But Christians should live like someone who is journeying beside a beautiful river of water. Drink as deeply from life as you want. Drink your fill of life. There is no need to hold back. You have an unlimited supply.

You see, the message of Easter doesn't just speak to the future. It speaks to us right here and right now. You will live forever. So, start acting like it right now. Drink deeply from life every day. Live without fear. Live joyfully. Be fully alive every day of your life.

Christ lives. And because he lives, you shall live also. Rejoice! The last enemy is defeated. Drink deeply from the unlimited waters of life which flow from the throne of God.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

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