

The Resurrection of Our Lord
Sunday April 8, 2007
Sermon by The Rev Timothy A Leitzke

This journey started with ashes: palm leaves, plucked green, waved joyously at Palm Sunday, April 9, 2006, then dried, yellowed, browned, burned, ground into powder, mixed with some olive oil in a black oily death, staring us in the face—stuck to our faces. Death obliterates Life. Death touches all of us at least once, usually a lot more often. It touched this community all too closely just 19 days ago. It's so close to us that it is said that the only two things in life that are guaranteed are death and taxes. Taxes come next weekend—and, by the way, Jesus doesn't offer any escape from those—but today God deals with Death.

Death was not part of the plan, according to the story of the Garden of Eden. Death snuck in with Sin, and as long as this sinful, broken universe plods on, Death will be a part of it. If our only hope is hope in this life, we are the most pitiable of all people. Death obliterates this life. “**Obliterate:** 1) to make undecipherable or imperceptible by obscuring or wearing away. 2) **a:** to remove utterly from recognition or memory **b:** to destroy utterly all trace, indication, or significance of **c:** to cause to disappear.”¹ That is what Death does to us. Our hope is that Death isn't the last word in our story, and that our journey does not end in ashes.

Ashes would be Jesus' fate. No, not after only three days or, rather, parts of three days—he would still look *mostly* like he did before, but ashes awaited. Jesus'

¹ *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, (Springfield: G & C Merriam Co., 1973)

body—*Jesus*—was as dead as a pile of ashes. God took that pile of ashes, and made an immortal life out of it. How did God do it? How does one pass from Death into Life? It is the mystery at the heart of our faith: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. In the words of the medieval Easter hymn, “Death and life have contended in that combat stupendous; the prince of life, who died, reigns immortal.”² In the words of St Paul, “Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Christ is first; there will be more. For now there is combat beyond our imagining, for death does not want to give up its grip on the universe.

Our lives are the battlefields in which the Reign of Death and the Reign of God fight for supremacy; today, we celebrate God’s guaranteed victory over Death. Be wary of projecting this reality away from ourselves. God and Death cannot be assigned literally, God to one real life political entity, Death to another. Nor can we say that there is an angel sitting on one shoulder and a devil on the other. Death & God are two dueling aspects of human nature. We are capable of great evil, and in us God is capable of inestimable good.

St Paul explains it symbolically in First Corinthians. ‘Since death exists through a man, also through a man exists the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, in the same manner also in Christ all shall be brought to life.’ All of us are in Adam—the name means ‘earthling’. All of us experience the same temptations he does and are captive to the same Sin that he is. We also are in

² “Christians, to the Paschal Victim” *ELW #371*, attributed to Wipo of Burgundy, d. ca 1050.

Christ—God’s chosen. All of us experience the same resurrection he does and are free to follow God as he does. Adam is that part of me who sins; Christ is that part of me who follows God. Adam ignores; Christ listens. Adam is tempted; Christ is saved from temptation. Adam uses whatever means necessary to feed his insatiable desire; Christ uses whatever gifts God gives him to feed the hungry world. Adam will turn to dust; out of the dust, God will raise Christ.

It’s the way that things are right now. It is salvation already/not yet. We are already free from Sin; we are not yet free from Sin. We are already raised from death daily through Baptism; we are not yet raised from the dead at the Last Day. We live in this broken universe, and Death is still a part of it, but all the while God, in the risen Christ, is destroying all of God’s enemies, and the last of those enemies is Death.

Friends of Christ, Death will be obliterated. It looks pretty strong right now with its 100% efficiency rate, but it is going down. It will dry out, fade, be burned and ground into powder. It will be annihilated—made into nothing, blotted out like ink, deleted like a typo in a word processor, wiped off the face of the earth...wiped off the face of the universe. It will blow away like dust. It will wash off like the ashes from our foreheads. Our journey *started* with ashes. It ends when God takes us from ashes to immortality, out of Death and into Life. The Life into which God brings us is Life without Death. Hope in our current life is pitiable because Death will obliterate it; hope in the new life into which Christ leads us is hope that endures, because Christ obliterates Death.

The same weak human who was handed over to Death now Reigns immortal until he defeats all of God's enemies and hands over his Reign to God, and then, Friends of Christ, comes the fulfillment of our hope, our hope that despite the fact that everything about us is lost to history, that we and everyone we cared about have been gone for untold eons and no one is left to remember us, God remembers. God remembers us because we belong to Christ who lives and reigns immortal as King of the universe, and when he has defeated Death and he hands over the Kingdom to his Father, we will be with him, raised to eternal life, where the only thing forgotten will be Death. Today is the dress rehearsal for Death's funeral, the day that we fully realize what it means to say that our journey *started* with ashes, but ends with us resurrected, out of death and into life. Amen