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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
20 April 2025

Sermon on 1 Corinthians 15:56-57

Worship Theme:

DEATH HAS LOST ITS STING

Death stings. Death casts a shadow over every moment of life; life doesn't last. Death separates us from loved ones; there are no phone calls or hugs from the dead. Death instills fear of what follows; deep down, every human being senses that after death there is some sort of judgment. Death stings. But because Christ lives, death has lost its sting for those who put their faith in the living Lord. Christ's resurrection proves that God accepted Jesus' death as the complete and final payment for all our sin. His resurrection is the assurance that our Christian loved ones are not lost and that we will see them again in the resurrection. His resurrection means that we too will rise to live in incomprehensible and unending joy in heaven. So, while death may still cause tears, Christ has defeated death. Because he lives, death has lost its sting!

Sermon Theme: **"He Gives Us the Victory!"**

1. Sin and Death Sting
2. Thanks Be to God!

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!

What is the most life-changing moment you have experienced? Maybe you think of something like getting your driver's license, graduating school, buying your first car or house, getting married, the birth of your child or grandchild. Regardless of how long we've lived, we all can look back on pivotal moments when our lives changed forever. And in cases like these, we couldn't be happier because these moments feel like incredible triumphs!

We have other life-changing moments too though, moments not quite as enjoyable or triumphant: a terrible sin we committed that destroyed our reputation and everyone's trust in us, losing a job, getting in an accident, receiving an incurable medical diagnosis, or the death of a dear loved one. These are all pivotal moments in our lives too, times when our lives change forever, changes we had no idea if or how we would get through and heal from. In cases like these, we wonder if we'll ever triumph in life again, because these feel like such dreadful defeats.

People have been experiencing this up-and-down, triumph-and-defeat existence since the very beginning. The worst defeat we ever experienced was the first one. Adam and Eve were living in the perfect Garden of Eden, enjoying complete harmony and unity with God in every way. Until a fallen angel called the devil came to them in the form of a snake and convinced them that God was holding out on them, that he wasn't as good or generous or caring as they thought. The devil told them the only way to fix what God had done to them was to eat fruit

from a certain tree, a tree which God had told them never to eat from. Then, the devil said, they would finally be truly equal to God. It would be life-changing!

In the midst of dreadful lies, there was one grain of truth in what Satan the devil told them: their lives did indeed change forever. In fact, the entire human race changed forever that day, experiencing the worst defeat we ever would as we went from perfect, holy, and sinless (the way God made us!) to imperfect, unholy, and sinful. Worse yet, because people had sinned, everything was broken now, and death began to tear apart God's formerly immortal creation. Life-changing, to say the least.

That's thousands of years ago, so by now, sin and death are so common to us that we just expect them to be part of life. The Bible clearly tells us we're sinners, so that means we're going to sin, and our daily experience only supports that. And sometimes we even say things like "death is just a natural part of life", even though it was never meant to be that way. Death doesn't surprise us, unless perhaps it happens earlier than expected or in a way we didn't anticipate. All our lives, we live in this strange middle ground between knowing death is unavoidable and also trying to do everything possible to avoid it. We hope that if we eat right, workout, and take care of ourselves that maybe we'll be the lucky person who somehow gets to keep on living!

But everyone knows it doesn't work that way. And even though sin and death don't necessarily surprise us anymore, they still hurt. Sin always leaves a mark, hurting and scarring us and the people around us. There's no such thing as a painless sin; it always damages and destroys. It never brings the joy and delight it promises; it only pushes us farther away from God and each other. **Sin stings!**

And death? There's no good way to describe what it feels like watching a loved one take their last gasp of air or feeling the final beat of their heart. It doesn't matter if it's a baby you never got to meet, a spouse of more than 60 years, or a great-grandparent over 100 years old – death always leaves a massive empty hole in our hearts. It ruins all the plans we made, all the hopes and dreams we had. Even the good times and memories we did get are overshadowed by death. **Death stings.**

It's a proven truth: **sin and death sting**, and every single person has and will continue to experience this. No matter what we try, we can't get rid of them or heal ourselves from them. They are permanently life-changing. Even the Apostle Paul – a great missionary and proclaimer of God's Word – had to admit this. *The sting of death is sin*. Death entered the world because of sin and now everyone gets stung by both and there's nothing we can do about it. It sounds like cause for despair – what can we possibly do? Should we just give up?!

While that's what we might expect, Paul says something quite different, something delightfully unexpected. Instead of admitting defeat in this life-changing battle against the **sting of sin and death**, Paul says, "**Thanks be to God!**" What? Thanks be to God? Why?! In anticipation of that question, Paul explains in beautifully simple words: "**He Gives Us the Victory!**"

When Satan convinced human beings to rebel against God, he thought he had won an incredible victory. He had ruined God's entire creation with the **sting**

of sin and death. But that wasn't about to stop God. God didn't look at the life-changing mess people had caused and say, "Well, I tried my best, but it looks like they're all doomed now. Well-played, devil." No! God does not lose, and certainly not to a worthless lying tyrant like the devil. The victory will never belong to Satan, and Holy Week proves it! TODAY proves it!

The very moment humanity fell into sin, God revealed his plan to save us. Not just alleviate a little pain here and there; no, a plan to truly and completely deliver, rescue, and save us from every single pain sin and death have ever caused. God would send a champion to conquer and destroy sin, death, and the devil forever. He promised it thousands of years ago! And Holy Week saw that promise fulfilled. This week is everything! It's the most important week in the entire history of the world, because this is the week when we see most clearly just how much God loves us even though we never did a single thing to deserve it. Just look at what happened this week:

- A man rode a donkey into a city that sang his praises for a day, and then completely turned around continuously screamed for his death.
- A man stooped down to serve a group of men who didn't deserve it, even the one who would betray him to his enemies only hours later.
- A man gives a precious priceless holy meal which truly strengthens faith and forgives sins.
- A man willingly dies one of the most painful deaths possible, slowly drying out as his blood drips to the dust below, all to pay the price for crimes he did not commit.
- A man who never should have felt either chooses to submit himself to the **sting of sin and death.**
- A man walks into hell itself, declaring complete and total victory over it!
- A man with holes in his hands and holes in his feet rises from the dead and walks out of his own tomb, proving that life has triumphed over death.

Who is the man? It's Jesus – the holy God himself! Why did he do all those things? For us – all of us, yes even me and you! That's the summary of this entire Holy Week and a decent summary of the entire message of the Bible: "Jesus for us."

Our champion is Jesus, God clothed in human flesh to save the entire human race from **the sting of sin and death.** It doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter where you've been, and it doesn't matter what you've done: God loves you. God has always loved you. And Holy Week proves it. Jesus' death on the cross was not a defeat; it was the greatest triumph! The holy blood of God was shed as an all-sufficient sacrifice and payment for sin, and Jesus' return to life on Easter morning is the undeniable evidence that his payment and sacrifice are accepted.

Now the great victory cry of 1 Corinthians 15 is also our Easter Victory cry: "*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?*" Easter may sound like a fairy tale that's too good and unbelievable to be true, but it's not. Every joy and victory of Easter is real, and all ours! Even though for right now we still live in this world so affected by **the sting of sin and death**, the victory of Easter is ours forever because **God has given us that victory!**

Because of Jesus, every sin you and I have ever committed is forgiven and gone – sin has lost its sting! Because of Jesus, death is no longer a terrible shadow over our lives – death has lost its sting too! Because of Jesus, now the worst thing death can do to us is BRING US HOME. Yes, you heard correctly. For everyone connected to Jesus Christ by faith, death is simply going home to be with our loving heavenly Father forever. That's the greatest victory!

And all that means EASTER is the most life-changing moment we will ever experience, and we don't ever need to stop celebrating it! Every day we get to live in the life-changing joy of Easter. **Sin and death may sting** for a time in this world, but they can't harm us forever. Satan, the lying tyrant, has fallen and lost. Jesus lives, the victory is won, and God's love for us has changed our lives forever.

"Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

Therefore, let this be our victory cry today, tomorrow, and forever: "Alleluia, Christ is risen!" "He is risen indeed, Alleluia!" AMEN!

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.