

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
April 20, 2014  
Easter Sunday**

**1 Corinthians 15:53-47**

**The Wounds of Death Are Vanquished**

- 1. You've Seen the Victory**
- 2. Death Was Not Victorious!**
- 3. Paul Helps Us Understand**

**Hymns: Op: I Know that My Redeemer Lives  
265 - 161 - 160 - 157  
Closing: 141**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

*For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. <sup>54</sup> When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."<sup>55</sup> "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"<sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

No doubt, you've seen the victory! I'm not talking about the victory you think. The victory I'm talking about comes with a sting. Its marks are familiar and recognizable: eyes filled with tears; hearts filled with sadness; lives left with an empty feeling. This victory is unsatisfying; it leaves people with uncertainties; it sends them searching for answers, grasping for any kind of hope. It is a truly ugly thing when death is victorious, and sadly, mankind knows it all too well.

So what to do? All kinds of attempts have been made to cover up that victory; to lessen the sting; to ease the pain and sadness. Just consider the thousands of dollars that are spent every time death claims another victory; expensive and luxurious coffins; detailed makeup and cosmetics; beautiful bouquets of flowers. And their purpose is obvious. They are attempts to mask the ugliness of death. But death can't simply be covered over with gloss. Through all

that is done in the face of death to cover it up, the truth is still very clear: Death is real; death is ugly; death is defeating.

On the first Easter morning, all of those marks of death were present for the followers of Jesus. In the wake of his crucifixion two days earlier, there was bitter sadness. Amongst the women who followed Jesus, the well of tears had not yet come close to drying up. And the questions and doubts were stirring in the disciples hearts. What had just happened? Why did it happen? What were they to do now? In the wake of death, there were all the marks we know so well. Sadness, pain, questions.

So, what did Jesus' friends do? They did what people always seem to do when death brings hurt and ugliness. Early on Sunday morning, at the first moment possible for them to do so, they went out to the new garden tomb where Jesus had been laid, intending to treat death like they always had before. They would do their best to cover up the ugliness that death had brought into Jesus' life and their lives as well. They had seen Death inflict wounds upon Jesus and now they would make their own feigned attempts at healing them up. They would give a proper burial, they would beauty up the ugliness, they would attempt to mask what death had done in claiming another victory.

But all of that would not be needed this Sunday morning. There was no need for those women to come to the grave to try to cover up death's victory, **BECAUSE DEATH HAD NOT BEEN VICTORIOUS!**

That was the message that would be delivered that first Easter morning.

Listen again to what Luke said, **"On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. <sup>2</sup> They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. <sup>5</sup> In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: <sup>7</sup> 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'"**

When those women came to the tomb, they expected death to be present; that is the norm for those who come to a tomb. It is why they brought the spices; it is why they came with tears; it's why they came in the cool of the early morning. But instead of being met by the reality of death that they had

witnessed on the cross, these women were greeted by an empty tomb. That empty tomb made the first declaration that Easter morning: “In this place, DEATH HAS NOT BEEN VICTORIOUS!”

However, there was uncertainty. The message from the empty tomb did not ring clearly in their minds, instead it raised more questions. “Where did he go? Who would take him? Why would they take him? Those women did not understand the message that the empty tomb proclaimed, so God sent angels as reinforcement. “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” they inquired of the women. The angels delivered a message of hope, but again the women did not quite understand. They were, in fact, looking for the dead, so their confusion about the empty grave remained. So, the angels dressed in white proclaimed it more clearly. Making the 2<sup>nd</sup> proclamation that Easter morning, they announced: “He is not here; he has risen! DEATH HAS NOT BEEN VICTORIOUS!” And for more proof, they pointed those women to one more proclamation; a proclamation that had been made long before this day.

Jesus himself had told these women the message that they were hearing from the angels outside that empty tomb on Easter morning. When they were following him, the message from Jesus was clear. “I will die. I will be crucified. But don’t worry, because though death will appear to be victorious as I hang upon that tree, a different reality will be revealed. DEATH HAS NOT BEEN VICTORIOUS!”

“Then they remembered his words,” Luke tells us. And filled with joy and excitement, they ran to share the news. Jesus was alive. God had raised him. Death had not been victorious in this instance. They would have their friend Jesus back.

But it went so much further than that. And at least in those early moments after Jesus’ resurrection, they didn’t fully comprehend this truth. The wounds of death were not just vanquished on that day. The wounds of death were vanquished forever.

And that is what Paul helps us understand in 1 Corinthians 15, a chapter of the Bible known as the Resurrection chapter. And as he explains all that the resurrection means for the Christian, he finishes with this great declaration: “*For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.*”<sup>54</sup> *When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”*<sup>55</sup> *“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”*<sup>56</sup> *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.*<sup>57</sup> *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

As Paul wrote those words, he knew a reality: just as it was on that first Easter Sunday, there will be times when death again wins apparent victories. In our own lives, it will happen. For each one of us, our mortal bodies will someday perish.

But Paul tells us that when that time comes, death is not winning any victory at all. In death, Paul says, “*The perishable will be clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.*” Paul says that death will not be victorious over us, rather we will be victorious in death. The death that appears to conquer and doom our bodies to decay will know its utter defeat when our bodies are resurrected and made imperishable and immortal. In the place of sadness, there will be joy; in the place of tears, there will be laughter; in the place of uncertainty, there will be confidence.

At that moment, we will know exactly what it means that “death has been swallowed up in victory,” and we will be able to sing this taunting song of victory: “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” And for mortal humans who only know the losing side of death, such promises of restoration and such satisfying songs in death might seem like an impossibility.

But Paul tells us that it is not just possible, it is reality. For us who live in this world, we know exactly what Paul means when he says “the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.” Born under the power of the law, we know exactly how often we fail and falter. And we know that punishment is deserved; the law is powerful to make that clear. And when death comes, it stings because we know it is deserved.

When Jesus came, he overpowered that same law with perfection. The law held no power to convict him, but still, he died. He chose to feel that terrible sting of death for us, taking the punishment of our sin and giving us his perfection. His perfection, his power over the law, is why he could make the declaration from the cross that the power of the law was finished, that the sting of death was done. Because he was delivered over to death for our sins. Jesus allows us to escape the deadly sting of sin.

And now through the empty tomb— we can be confident that God the Father accepted the sacrifice. “He was raised to life because our declaration of being not guilty was complete.” (Romans 3:25) And that means that death did not just lose one battle on Easter Sunday, it means death has lost forever. And that is why Easter matters to us. That is why Easter is a celebration for us. Easter isn’t just a day where life was given to Jesus. Easter is a day where life is given to us.

You have seen the victory! Its marks are truly beautiful. They are unending joy, they are loud songs

of victory, they are lives filled with the love of God. It is a glorious truth that Jesus is victorious, and gladly, on this Easter Sunday, we know that we too have victory over death. Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Sing out those words that our very real victory: Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!