

OUR MISSION

As God's disciples, we the men, women and children of Apostles are united in the preaching, teaching and sharing of God's Word in its truth and purity.

By God's grace, we will nurture believers and joyfully spread the Word of God in our community and throughout the world, all to His glory.

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This Week's Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 15:55-57

Where, O Death, Is Your Victory?

Pastor Jay Bickelhaupt

Jesus Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!

Peace to you who trust in Jesus Christ. He has given us victory over death! Amen.

"The thrill of victory... the agony of defeat." I have heard these words many times spoken in the wide world of sports and also in other areas of competition. I have competed against men in football and against my sons in High-Ho-Cheerio and Go Fish. Yesterday I was in competition with my computer and I hate to admit it but I think I lost. Often it has been the case that it seems I have had more agonies than thrills. But there have been a few times that I have been amongst the winning team. There may not be a more intense feeling of joy as to stand as the champions celebrating with your teammates. Often after championship games the benches clear and the stands empty as players and fans embrace and celebrate the victory. After fixing a computer or maybe a broken car it feels good to have conquered the challenge or problem. I think everyone would agree that we would rather experience the thrill of victory instead of the agony of defeat. Even as spectators we want to see the team that we root for win because defeat is down-right depressing whether it be against man or machine.

You may be someone who thrives on competition or someone who avoids it at all cost. However, as soon as we enter this world we begin competing against the fiercest opponent of all time. Death has the most victories chalked up in the win column. Death has entered every home and every life causing much fear and much grief. It challenges the weak as well as the strong. Death steals the possessions from the very rich and from the very poor. It defeated everyone who has ever lived except two. The Bible tells us that Enoch and Elijah were taken into heaven before they died and we would probably call them blessed. Death is the worst and the strongest enemy that we need not fear. We are not to worry about death. We are not to agonize over defeat but to celebrate the fact that our Savior rose from the dead. We are to

celebrate the victory that we as believers have over death.

Death no longer has bragging rights. Death can no longer taunt us with fear and agony. Jesus is risen. Therefore you and I can, with the apostle Paul, taunt death with words from the great resurrection chapter of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 15:55-57.

1 Corinthians 15:55-57

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Remove the sting and you remove the threat.

Where is the sting? That is often the question when it comes to bugs, isn't it? My boys ask that often when they find a bug in the backyard. "Dad, can it sting us?" The insects that can sting are often feared greatly. Bumblebees will stop a bare foot from stepping on it. A scorpion backs off a larger enemy with a raised tail that can have a potentially deadly sting. But if bees or scorpions could not sting would they be feared. Remove the sting and you remove the threat. The bugs that cannot sting are harmless.

Death's powerful sting is sin. Without sin there is no death. Adam and Eve would have lived forever in the Garden of Eden as God's sinless creation. But as soon as Eve and Adam took a bite of the forbidden fruit and disobeyed God the curse of death entered the world. Ever since the fall, sin was passed down from generation to generation right to you and me. From the beginning of the life that God gave to us we were sinful. King David wrote in Psalm 51:5, "Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from

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the time my mother conceived me.” That is why the unborn, infants, middle-aged and the elderly are all susceptible to death: because all are sinners! The enemy had us cornered. Death taunted us with the fear of the unknown and mocked us with the fact that he gets the last laugh because death is the end.

The sting, the agony of death, results from sin. Sin is simply not following God’s will and breaking the law whenever we please. How often do we do what God forbids and fail to do what he asks? Death is the undeniable evidence that none of us is perfect. None of us has lived up to God’s holy standard. Therefore all of us deserve punishment and death in hell.

But remember we are not to mourn but to celebrate. Verse 55 that the apostle Paul penned nearly two-thousand years ago is the greatest taunt ever spoken to an opponent. It mocks death. “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” Jesus, the Son of God, entered the struggle with death when he was born into this world. He

Death has lost its sting because Jesus removed sin from you.

fulfilled the law completely by living the perfect life that we cannot. Then the ultimate battle was fought on Golgotha when Satan, the prince of hell, wielded the sword of death against the Son of God. Christ Jesus felt the sting of death and many thought and still think today that he experienced the agony of defeat.

But where, O death, is your sting? Where, O death, is your victory? The tomb is open and Jesus has risen! His resurrection guarantees us that the perfect life he gave on the cross was a satisfying payment for sin and guilt. Your sin and mine was nailed to the cross with Christ. Trusting in Jesus’ sacrifice, his blood washes us clean making us holy and blameless before the Lord. You are spiritually beautiful before God because you have been clothed in Jesus’ holi-

ness with no stain of sin. That is why we sing and shout, “Alleluia!”

Death has lost its sting because Jesus removed sin from you. Easter is the greatest celebration on earth because it reminds us of our full and free forgiveness. No longer are we sitting on the side lines of hell agonizing over defeat but instead you and I celebrate the victory that Christ has given us. You have victory over death through faith in Christ. Easter is not just a reminder of the victory that we have through Jesus but Easter also allows us to rejoice with the loved ones who have died. This year some of us celebrated Easter for the first time without the ones we love. Yet, Jesus’ resurrection gives us the sure hope that we will see our loved ones someday in heaven. The bodies that are buried, the bodies that we have, even though they die will rise again to life. Because he lives we too will live. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? Thanks to God who gives to you and me the victory through Jesus Christ!

Easter is a special day of celebration in our year, isn’t it? We get together with family and friends. We buy Easter dresses for our little girls and handsome outfits for the little boys. We hide Easter eggs and have a fine Easter breakfast before worship. We change our regular routine and adjust our schedule to celebrate. However, Easter does not change our lives for just one day. The message of sins forgiven and victory over death changes our entire life.

The resurrection enables you to be an optimist in life when we realize that our greatest enemy has been destroyed and the greatest promise has been fulfilled. I cannot wait to eat Easter dinner with my family but more than that I can’t wait to eat the heavenly feast promised to me in my Savior. I can’t wait to be united with my father, my grandparents and friends. I can’t wait to be united with Jesus who died and lives for me. The resurrection gives us an eternal future in paradise. Death for the Christian is no longer the end but simply the beginning. The promise of life is a gift that can cheer us when we are down, when we are having a bad day or when death has affected our lives. Life in Jesus is yours! Believe in him and you will be saved!

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Every day you can live in this Easter promise drawing strength from your almighty God. I encourage all of you to stand firm in the faith and let nothing move you. Give yourselves fully to God knowing that your labor in the Lord and your faith in him is not in vain. Give your life to the one who gave his life for you! Live without fear doing his will and work!

Through your living, through your singing and through your prayers this morning let us allow the thrill of victory to be heard and seen.

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!



Jay Bickelhaupt is serving as pastor at Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church in Billings, Montana. For contact information, please visit us at www.apostlesmt.net.

This Week's Announcements

SHARING GOD'S LOVE WITH OTHERS- Ladies Guild chose Tumbleweed Runaway Program, Inc. as our May service project. Tumbleweed is a non-profit, community-based group that helps youth in crisis. They are moving into a new space (a house) and will have rooms for six youth in need. We have offered to help outfit their kitchen. A list of what is needed is posted in the narthex. New or gently used items will be collected through May 6. Please consider giving gen-

erously to these youth who haven't had all the blessings of life in a loving, Christian home.

SPRING TEA- Apostles' annual Spring Tea, sponsored by the Ladies Guild, will be held at 11 a.m. on Saturday, May 6 in the Fellowship Hall. This is a great opportunity for the women of Apostles to enjoy food, fun and fellowship as we celebrate Spring in Montana! Bring your favorite appetizer to share.

Not So Out of Body

Grace MEMO

Pastor Daron Lindemann

Last week the National Geographic Society announced that it was publishing the Gospel of Judas, an ancient Egyptian manuscript. In the year A.D. 180 Iraneaus, the Christian bishop of Lyon, discredited the document as false and heretical. After hearing details about some of the contents, I can see why.

First, the Gospel of Judas disagrees with the Bible's gospels about the role that Judas played in the arrest, trials, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Throughout the reliably authentic gospels in the Bible, Judas is the sinister betrayer whose petty greed opens the door for the devil's greater temptations to turn on Jesus. This is validated by Jesus' frequent and merciful efforts to call Judas to see the danger of his sin and turn back from the dark side.

However, the Gospel of Judas portrays Judas as the only disciple who really understands Jesus, and he is following Jesus' orders to betray him. It presents the ultimate mission of Jesus as the desire to be killed – not so that sinners could be freed – but so that Jesus' spirit could be freed from his body. That's because Jesus' spirit was trapped in the flesh of his body, and true salvation comes only when one's spirit escapes the materialistic prison of the body. Jesus would do this by his death, according to the document and its teachings reflecting an antichristian teaching of that time (and today in similar forms) known as Gnosticism.

So then, according to the Gospel of Judas, what is material in Jesus is bad. His body is useless, actually a hindrance to his mission. To benefit anyone, he needs to get rid of his body. "You will exceed all of [the other disciples]," he tells Judas in this document, "for you will sacrifice the man who clothes me."

One doesn't need to look far – on this Thursday of Holy Week – to find the antithesis to such Gnostic heresy. On this day that Christians call "Maundy Thursday," we find comfort, forgiveness, inspiration, and strength from the very material of Jesus that the Gospel of Judas claims he didn't want or need. His body. It is given to us in Holy Communion!

"This is my body given for you," Jesus tells believers, "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

Jesus wasn't looking to free his spirit trapped in a materialistically evil body, he was looking to free troubled spirits and burdened souls like ours from the trap of sin and guilt. He assures repentant sinners that such is the case by instituting Holy

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Communion for us, so that we can take his very body and when we eat it find his holiness, his power, his everlasting life.

PRAYER: Thank you, dear Jesus, for taking on human flesh and living in our world as a brother to us. Comfort us in our temptations with the remembrance that you were tempted with fleshly cravings too. On this Maundy Thursday, we share in your body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Grant that we receive this miraculous gift of your grace with faith, so that it renews our trust in you and our love for one another. Amen.

Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church
Billings, Montana

Worship Services Sunday at 10:30 a.m. and Monday at 6:30 p.m.

Sunday School and Adult Bible Classes Sunday at 9:15 a.m.

Men's Bible Study Monday morning at 6:30 a.m.

Women's Study Tuesday morning at 10:00 a.m.

Contact the pastor at (406) 656-7141 about the opportunities to join a **Bible Information Class**.

More information and resources are available on our website at www.apostlesmt.net or by contacting the church office at (406) 656-7141.

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Inside: This Week's Sermon

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Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church
3140 Broadwater Avenue
Billings, MT 59102

Mail to:

Visit us on the web at www.apostlesmt.net.