
GOD DESTROYS DEATH SO THAT HE MAY RE-CREATE LIFE

Sermon for the Resurrection of our Lord 2022

Isaiah 65:17-25

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our First Reading from before Isaiah 65:17-25: ¹⁷“For look! I am creating a new heaven and a new earth. The earlier things will not be remembered or come to mind. ¹⁸ However, be glad and rejoice for ever in what I am creating! For look! I am creating Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight. ¹⁹ I shall rejoice over Jerusalem and be glad about My people. The sounds of weeping and lamentation will no longer be heard in the city. ²⁰ No longer will there be a baby in it who lives for only a few days or an old man who does not live out his days. For anyone who dies at a hundred years old will still be a young man. Anyone who fails to reach a hundred years old when he dies will be regarded as cursed. ²¹ They will build houses and live in them. They will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² They will not build and have someone else live there. They will not plant and have another eat from it. For the days of My people will be like the days of a tree, and My chosen people will enjoy what their hands produce. ²³ They will not toil for nothing or bear children for sudden calamity.”

For they will be the offspring of those whom the LORD has blessed, and their children will be with them.

²⁴ “I Myself shall answer even before they call and I Myself shall hear while they are still speaking. ²⁵ The wolf and the lamb will graze together. The lion will eat straw like the ox, but the snake’s food will be dust. They will not do any harm or destroy anything anywhere on My holy mountain,” the LORD has said.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Christ has been raised, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep!¹ Listen again to the words of the two men out at the tomb, who asked the women: “*Why are you looking among the dead for Him who is alive? **He is not here but has been raised***” (Luke 24:5-6). Christ has been raised! That means that we who are in Christ have new life! That means, too, that we shall be raised from the dead, now in our baptism and then on the Last Day to life everlasting! What glorious things await us! How comforting to know that! Nothing else in the entire world can take that joy away from us. Remember the words from Luther’s hymn? “*And take they our life: Goods, fame, child, and wife: Though these all be gone, Yet our foes have not won; The kingdom ours remaineth*” (Hymn 195, v. 4). And Jesus says, “*Come, you whom My Father has blessed! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the time when the world was created!*” (Matt. 25:34).

What joy all this brings, however, there is still another matter, and that is the matter of death.

As we gather on this Easter Sunday, celebrating resurrection, we are all dying. Death comes to us all. Who knows, for any one of us, today could be our last day on earth. Any one of us could be called to eternal glory *at any time*. But this sad and sobering truth is not meant to kill our Easter joy, quite the opposite! But we know the realities of this reminder, often called to mind in the secular world, filled with all sorts of attempts to cure diseases, reverse the aging process, to prolong our lives. Yet, despite a host of medical marvels and even miracles, it can’t be done. Sure, we can prolong life, but we are dying, as it were, from the moment we are born. Death surrounds us in our lives, from losing aged loved ones to random acts of killing in our streets.

We even plan for death. We have a last will and testament. We do estate planning. We prepare our own funeral, choosing hymns and readings and so forth, and even buy or reserve cemetery plots.

Yes, indeed, we are dying, and the Word of God only adds to our awareness of the problem, revealing the underlying cause. “*The wages of sin is death*” (Rom. 6:23). Again, “*You also were dead in your trespasses and sins*” (Eph. 2:1).

But here is the joyful and triumphant truth: this story of death is not the whole story, not even the right story, and certainly *not the end of the story*. God had a plan not just to cheat death or to prolong life but to destroy death and restore

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:20

life, as He intended it to be, and to do so *forever*. God's plan, from the beginning, is for life, a life that is ours now as resurrection life in Christ.

The world as we know it was not God's original design or plan. We all remember the accounts of creation when God had proclaimed it all not just good but "*very good*."² And that was by His standards! That plan included God's people; first, His specially created couple, put in a special place where they lived in harmony with each other, with all creation, with God.

Of course, we know the story, the Fall, how sin and death entered God's perfect world. But God had a greater plan and a greater story, anchored in two key truths: Sin must be dealt with, and with it, death. And new life must be given by the same Creator who had breathed life in the first place.

That, in short and in sum, is the story we are telling and retelling today, when the most important events in all human history, in all of God's holy history, took place. Christ died for our sins. Yes, He really died. Many thought that that was the end of the story, and even knowing that His death was God's atonement for our sins is not the whole story. Now comes new life, *resurrection life*: Christ has been raised! And with Him, we, too, know that death is not the end of the story; death is not the plan for our lives.

And even that is not the whole story. Isaiah tells us there is still more, more to the plan, more to the story. This new life in Christ, which is ours by baptism, is only the down payment, the firstfruits, that foretaste of the feast to come. Creation plays a major role throughout Isaiah's "vision" (1:1). Now, Isaiah tells us that God will create a new heaven and a new earth, a new creation. He writes, **"For look! I am creating a new heaven and a new earth. The earlier things will not be remembered or come to mind."**¹⁸ **However, be glad and rejoice for ever in what I am creating! For look! I am creating Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight.**¹⁹ **I shall rejoice over Jerusalem and be glad about My people. The sounds of weeping and lamentation will no longer be heard in the city."** This new creation does not mean that God will start from scratch as in the first creation, which began with no life and contained no people during the first five days. Instead, those whom God has claimed in the old creation will be reclaimed and restored. God will remake us and His world.

Isaiah had had a very long life and had seen it all: good times and bad. God's people had prospered, but with prosperity had come spiritual depravity, as they

² Genesis 1:31

had it a bit too good. Sacrifices and service had come easy; people could pay for it. They began to turn their backs on the Creator.

So God, using earthly means in the form of the ruthless Assyrians, a terrorist nation churning through the ancient middle east, *took it all away*. God's people now suffered, it seemed, with the Northern Kingdom destroyed and Judah - even Jerusalem - threatened and all but conquered.

Isaiah had quite a life, calling God's people to repentance and faithfulness in the face of the realities of a hostile world. Frankly, not much has changed since then. The technologies of war and terrorism get more sophisticated, but the underlying issues remain. Sin and death surround us, and we can only try to ward them off.

But God has a better plan, a better way. It's not just about *trying harder* to live healthier lives, being good stewards of the life He has given us. It's not about giving us *another chance* at getting it right. It's not simply about *fixing or reforming* our sinful ways. No, God's plan gets to the heart of the problem: sin and death. Jesus has gotten to the heart of the plan: He has died for the sins of the world.

But here's the surprise, what makes God's plan so amazing. He dies so that He, so that *we*, may live. He kills in order to make alive. He destroys death so that He may re-create life.

It's like a whole new creation, and it's not just good but "very good." And there is a special place for His special people. Isaiah calls it "**Jerusalem**," but this is no longer just the city in Judah or Israel; this is the place where God dwells in the midst of His people, the capital city not of a political country but of the kingdom of God. It is, in short, where "the dwelling place of God is with man," as John puts it in Revelation 21:3, where "*He will dwell with them,*" and "*they will be His people.*" Isaiah records the LORD God saying, "**I Myself shall answer even before they call and I Myself shall hear while they are still speaking.**" In this Jerusalem, all barriers between our loving Father and us will be forever banished. We shall enjoy the kind of access that is now known only in part.³

For now, while we are still upon this earth, this new creation is wherever the risen Christ is present, where He comes to us in His Word of death and new life,

³ Romans 5:2; Ephesians 2:8, 3:12; Hebrews 4:16

when we poor, miserable sinners, lost and condemned creatures, hear His words of forgiveness and life. When the Lord says, “I forgive you your sins,” we have become children of God, or as Isaiah calls us, “**offspring of those whom the LORD has blessed.**”

For now, this place of new creation is wherever the risen Christ takes our lives of sin and death into His own life of death and resurrection. The Apostle Paul writes, “*Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might begin to live a new life.*”⁵ *If we have been planted together with Him in the likeness of His death, then we shall be planted together with Him also in the likeness of His resurrection*” (Romans 6:4-5). Christ’s death and resurrection were the basis of the righteousness that the Father credited to us to make us children of God, fit for His kingdom. But Christ’s death and resurrection do even more. They are also the power enabling us to lead new lives. In this new life of faith, we are enabled to do what is pleasing to God. As such, it is a life of faithful obedience to God’s will, not rebellion against His commandments by continuing in sin.

For now, this place of new creation is wherever the risen Christ comes to be with us in His body and blood, “*given and shed for the forgiveness of sins.*” And if anyone is “in Christ,” “*he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Look! They have become new*” (2 Cor. 5:17).

And that’s just for now. God still has plans for us. This is just the firstfruits, the foretaste. There is a whole feast to come! This whole sinful mess of a world, of our lives, is at best a mix of joy and sorrow - for many so much more sorrow and sadness, frustration and frenzy, and for all a reminder that, yes, we are dying. But this whole sinful mess of a world, God’s good creation now fallen, falling, down and out, this life as we know it, *will end.*

But that’s not the end of the story or of God’s plan. Christ has been raised, and with Him the promise of whole *new* creation. God will create His place on earth as a joy and His people within it to be a gladness. No more will be heard the sound of weeping or the cry of distress. “**They will not do any harm or destroy anything anywhere on My holy mountain.**” We shall be with God, and He with us, *forever.*

We make holiday plans, life plans, yes, even estate plans. We plan for our lives, and we plan for our death, that inevitable, sad, and sobering reality.

However, God has a plan - for life! That is what we have celebrated these past days and this very day. Even the disciples were surprised when Jesus showed up alive, risen, and resurrected on the third day. But this was all according to plan. God has dealt with sin and death, and now comes God's new creation of life.

Only God the Creator can create life when there is no life, and God will also take our lives, already dead in trespasses and sins, and create in us clean hearts and new lives, and on that Last Day, re-create into us that breath of life that makes us part of His new creation.

Christ has died. Christ has been raised, and Christ *will come again*. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR EASTER SUNDAY

Heavenly Father, we thank and praise You for Your mercy in raising from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank You for the assurance His resurrection gives us of all our spiritual blessings.

Give us today the radiant joy of the first Easter. Fill our hearts with its glorious good news and precious promises. Make us glad that You have raised Christ, who was delivered because of our offences in order that You might reckon us as righteous before You. We praise You that, because of His resurrection from the dead, You will also raise us, and that death has no more power over us.

Grant us a living faith, free of all doubts, faith that accepts the sure evidence of His resurrection. Give us power to confess our risen Lord Jesus with our mouths. Grant that we may be faithful unto death, and receive the crown of life. Equip us through Christ, our life, who now sits as a human being like us, at Your right hand, with power to live the new life, with our minds on Him, our heavenly treasure.

Guide us by Your Word as we make our way through this world, so that we may walk in Your ways, trust in Your promises, and experience Your richest blessings in this life and the one to come.

Look in mercy on our homes. Fill our families with a sense of Your goodness and providence. Teach them to rejoice especially in the gift of endless life in Your risen Son.

Rule the nations of the earth, and lead them to be obedient to You. Direct the lives of all people, that they may fear and love You, and know the risen Lord, who has the words of eternal life.

We pray for Your Church. Grant that everywhere it may have faithful and true shepherds, who proclaim the Gospel with conviction. Give all believers greater confidence because of Jesus' resurrection.

Grant us a rich measure of Your Spirit, provide us with power, willingness, to do Your will, and the courage and ability to make your Gospel known to others. To Christ be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD, Easter Day

Isaiah 65:17-25

¹⁷ “For look! I am creating a new heaven and a new earth. The earlier things will not be remembered or come to mind. ¹⁸ However, be glad and rejoice for ever in what I am creating! For look! I am creating Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight. ¹⁹ I shall rejoice over Jerusalem and be glad about My people. The sounds of weeping and lamentation will no longer be heard in the city. ²⁰ No longer will there be a baby in it who lives for only a few days or an old man who does not live out his days. For anyone who dies at a hundred years old will still be a young man. Anyone who fails to reach a hundred years old when he dies will be regarded as cursed. ²¹ They will build houses and live in them. They will plant

vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² They will not build and have someone else live there. They will not plant and have another eat from it. For the days of My people will be like the days of a tree, and My chosen people will enjoy what their hands produce. ²³ They will not toil for nothing or bear children for sudden calamity.”

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1 Corinthians 15:19-26

¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all other people. ²⁰ However, now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a man. ²² For, as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ However, each one in his own turn: Christ is the first-fruits. After that, when He comes, those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom to God, the Father, after He has put an end to all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For He must reign until God has put all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

Luke 24:1-12

¹ On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, some women went to the tomb, carrying the spices that they had prepared. ² They found that the stone had been rolled back from the tomb, ³ but, when they went in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were troubled about this, suddenly two

men stood beside them in clothes that were shining like lightning. ⁵ The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground. The two men asked the women, “Why are you looking among the dead for Him who is alive?” ⁶ He is not here but has been raised. Remember how He told you while He was still in Galilee: ⁷ ‘The Son of Man must be delivered to the hands of sinful men and be crucified and rise again on the third day!’”

⁸ Then they remembered His Words. ⁹ When the women returned from the tomb, they reported all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ The women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, the mother of James, and the others with them. They told these things to the apostles. ¹¹ However, these words seemed like nonsense to the Eleven. and they would not believe them. ¹² However, Peter got up and ran to the tomb. He bent down and saw only the strips of linen. Then he went away, wondering to himself about what had happened.