

"Mop-up Action"

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:19-26

*"Awake my heart with gladness, see what today is done;
Now after gloom and sadness, comes forth the glorious Sun.
My Savior there was laid, where our bed must be made
When to the realms of light our spirit wings its flight.*

*The Foe in triumph shouted, when Christ lay in the tomb
But, lo, he now is routed, his boast is turned to gloom,
For Christ again is free; in glorious victory
He who is strong to save has triumphed o'er the grave!"* (TLH 192)

Dear Fellow Christians:

There are many incredible gifts that we routinely take for granted. One is the privilege to carry the name of Christ Jesus. Think of the rare honor it is for Christians to bear that name at all times – but especially as we continue to celebrate the resurrection of Christ our Lord. Our salvation, for time and eternity, has been sealed – by the One whose name we carry. Easter is the time when salvation, *our* salvation, is complete. Our eternal future has been verified, sealed for all time and eternity. The ultimate, decisive battle between Good and evil has been joined and the outcome, at Easter, has been declared to the world. Jesus Christ has conquered sin and Satan. Mankind has been rescued from the certain torment that awaited us all. The payment has been made, and God has declared the payment complete. All of mankind combined could never offer adequate thanks and praise to our Savior God for what he has done for us.

And you and I bear his Name. Obviously this is an honor we never want to take for granted. So also this morning we continue our celebration of the empty tomb with a reminder of what the Christ, the Anointed One, has accomplished for us. The text that forms the basis for our study on this Sunday after Easter is the word of the Holy Spirit recorded through Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians, the Fifteenth Chapter – the great "Resurrection Chapter":

ESV 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 *If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. ²⁰ ¶ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the*

firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

This is God's Word. As our most precious, our most prized possession, we study these words with awe and reverence, praying as always, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!" Amen.**

There are dark forces at work in our nation of which most citizens remain blissfully ignorant. Identifying those dark forces often helps to explain the otherwise inexplicable decisions and actions of those in power. In his farewell address to the nation in 1961, President Dwight Eisenhower first identified, and then delivered his famous warning against, the rising power of what he called "*the military/industrial complex*" that had emerged during the Second World War. His warning was especially striking in that Eisenhower had also served as the Supreme Allied Commander during that conflict. The United States had, of necessity, transformed itself into a war machine after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. While necessary, the transformation made individuals and companies unimaginably wealthy, and with incredible wealth came incredible power and influence. Unfortunately, the only means of perpetuating that wealth and power was unending war. To many this is the only realistic explanation for sacrificing so many young American lives in places like Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. No sane person wants to sacrifice their life, or the life of their loved ones, in unnecessary wars. Nor does anyone want to sacrifice life in a cause the outcome of which has already been determined – which is commonly referred to as "mop-up action." A "mop up action" is when an enemy has been broken and defeated but battles are still being waged and soldiers are still dying. No one wants to die in war, but it was particularly unappealing for soldiers to die in a struggle that has already been decided, one way or the other.

This is the sort of situation in which we Christians find ourselves today. In our case, Jesus Christ won the war for us. Our Champion fought the terrifyingly powerful forces of Satan and prevailed. That means that not one single human being need die in the "mop up action" that will continue until Christ returns. The outcome of the struggle has already been decided. Jesus paid the price in full for the salvation of every man, woman, and child. As is true at the end of every conflict, here too while every *eternal* death is tragic in every way, how utterly

heartbreaking for anyone to die eternally when their victory has already been won.

The tragedy of souls dying in unbelief when the payment for their sins has already been made for them is only magnified by the ferocity and the brutality of the war that Jesus won for us. No one could ever *over-estimate* or overstate what our Lord accomplished in our stead. When our Lord died for our sins, what good thing could anyone have said that was *not* true about him? Selfless dedication, loving son, community leader, a man who left his mark on the world like no other. Jesus was humble, hard working, caring, a force for good. He was, in short, the perfect human being. But he was so much more than the perfect human being. He was, from first to last, our Champion, our Savior, our Lord God of Sabaoth.

Imagine the most terrifying enemy earth could possibly produce. Now multiply the horror and the evil of that creature ten thousand-fold and you begin to have a picture of Satan. Now picture yourself having to do battle with such a creature. Understand that you must not only fight this hideous beast, though you cannot even see him, you must defeat him. The stakes could not be higher, for the outcome of this battle was either heaven or hell. Lose this battle (slip up even once) and you will be tormented with this beast for all eternity.

What unspeakable relief was ours when Jesus Christ, our Champion, stepped to our side and said, in effect, *"Let me do this for you."* Who among us deserved such a thing, such a selfless gift? Clearly no one was worthy of so great a kindness. Think back now to the battle that raged during Jesus' time on earth, and try to get a sense of just how utterly helpless we would have been in such a struggle. Luther's words in the famous hymn come to mind:

*"With might of ours could naught be done, soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the Valiant One, whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye Who is this? Jesus Christ it is, of Sabaoth Lord, and there's none
other God;
He holds the field forever."* (TLH 262 v. 2)

The battle reached its climax on Good Friday – the utter agony of our Champion revealed in those terrible words spoken from the cross: **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?"** In those words were all the torments of hell. Here was justice being meted out for every sin of every human being ever conceived.

Only Jesus could have won such a battle for us. Is there now any praise or act of thanksgiving too good for such a Savior? Is there any good thing we could say about him that is not true?

According to human reckoning, a champion who dies on the field of battle has lost the battle, as when Goliath fell under the sling and stone of the young shepherd-boy David. Yet here things are different. Christ Jesus was not conquered *by* death; he conquered sin and Satan *through* death. So we read in Hebrews 2:14-15, ***"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."***

All of the sacrifices throughout the whole Old Testament served as constant reminders that the sacrifice for sin had to be a blood offering. Life, in the divine system of justice, could only come from death – the shedding of blood. Only the blood of our Lord Jesus could pay such a debt. Even in the Old Testament the sacrificial lamb had to be not only a perfect animal, without spot or blemish or defect of any kind, the lamb had to die. This too was a foretelling of just what would be necessary to cover our debt: Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God, had to shed his blood. Jesus, our Savior, had to die.

Jesus conquered the enemies against which we were powerless, the enemies that nonetheless *had to be defeated* if we were to escape eternal torment in hell. By his perfect life, given in innocent death on the cross, our Champion has broken the power of our great adversary. Satan can therefore have no power over us *unless we let him*. Again the words of Luther's great hymn:

*"Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill, they shall not overpower us.
This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will
He can harm us none, he's judged; the deed is done;
One little word can fell him."* (TLH 262 v. 3)

That *"one little word"* that can fell Satan (against which the devil is utterly powerless) is, of course, "Jesus." The empty tomb is all the proof that we need to assure us that our great and terrible enemy has truly been crushed, utterly defeated. Yet while this terrible foe has been routed, the struggle remains – the "mop up action" goes on. In fact our text tells us that one enemy still remains, and will remain until the end. The bitter irony is that this is an enemy of our own making.

Our text tells us, "**For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.**" ²² **For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.**" The last enemy that remains to be destroyed, the one for which man himself is responsible, is death. Man created this enemy. We are the ones who by our sins brought into the world not only spiritual death (the separation of the soul from God) but also physical death (the separation of the body from the soul).

While our text uses Adam as representative of all sinners, we take no comfort in blaming Adam. How naively foolish to imagine that we would have fared any better than did our first parents in the Garden of Eden. The result is that this one enemy remains, and what sadness and misery it continues to cause.

Yet note well, dear Christians, that soon, soon, death itself will be *destroyed, abolished*. It has already been *conquered*. When Christ rose from the dead he most certainly conquered death for us. "**Christ Jesus took away the power of death and by the gospel brought into the light the life which cannot be destroyed.**" (2 Timothy 1:10 – NET) Though conquered, and with its power to do us any eternal spiritual harm gone, physical death is still a formidable enemy. Man was not created to die; yet death still awaits us all – right up until our Lord Jesus returns. It is now to our Lord's return that we look with eager anticipation. Our text assures us that "**at Christ's coming... the last enemy that will be destroyed is death.**" It is hard for us to imagine an existence without death, and yet that day will certainly come. When Christ returns, not only will the saints be raised, we will be raised *incorruptible* and *imperishable*. There will be no more death of any kind. Death will not only be conquered, it will be annihilated – a thing of the past. This means that not only will bodies never again die; it also means that that which is called death shall no longer even exist. Death depends on sin and Satan for its very existence. When these are gone, death too is gone.

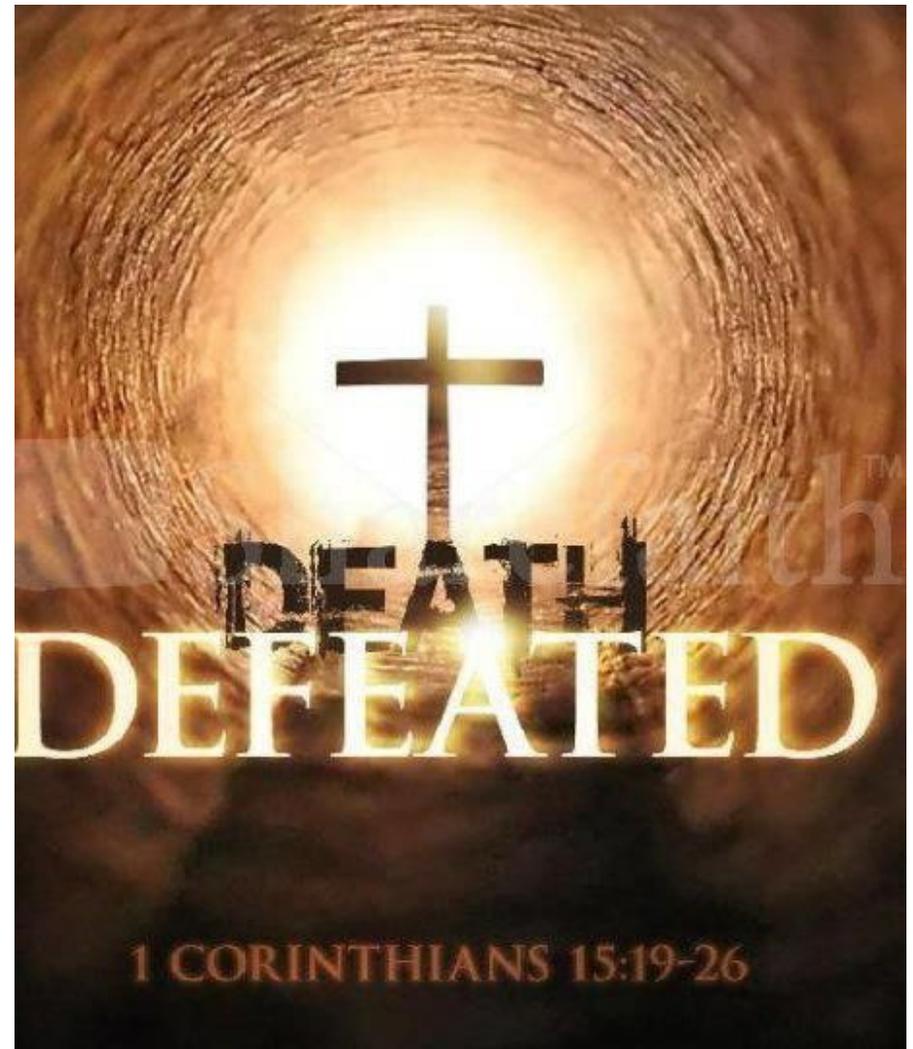
As Christians who continue to revel in the victory proclaimed by the empty tomb of our Lord, we rejoice even more in the fact that, for human beings, the best is yet to come. Though we live now in joyful anticipation of our Lord's return and the final Judgment and Resurrection, one glorious day our anticipation will be turned to personal participation. While now we cling to the promise of heaven in faith, remind yourself often of the reality of that truth, and of the unimaginable bliss of an eternal existence with our God and Lord.

In the meantime, do not fear that last enemy, death. Its power over us has been shattered by our Champion. It exists now only as the portal to a far greater existence. Do, however, walk carefully. We still live in dangerous times. Though the devil has been defeated and his power over us has been broken, we still possess more than enough foolishness to throw away the victory that has been given to us. Resolve also that no other human being will die for lack of a simple word from us – the simple truth that Jesus also paid for their sins. Their war too has already been won. In Christ, we've won. Without him, we lose. It truly is as simple as that. Amen.

ESV **1 John 1:1 - 2:2** That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life-- ² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us-- ³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. ⁵ ¶ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

ESV **John 20:19-29** On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." ²⁴ ¶ Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." ²⁶ ¶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

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The Sunday after Easter – April 7, 2024

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 730 (Brown Hymnal)

"Now Let the Heav'ns Be Joyful"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Epistle Lesson: (1 John 1:1 – 2:2) The First Epistle of John begins with a rather striking reaffirmation that what the author was writing was not hearsay. What he wrote was that which he actually witnessed, experienced, lived. He saw and interacted with Jesus of Nazareth – saw him live, die, and live again. These are the things the author wants to share with us all these centuries later. His purpose is clear: those who know and believe these truths will be saved. Those who reject will be eternally tormented.

Psalm 100 (Supplement page 35) (Brown Hymnal)

The Gospel Lesson: (John 20:19-29) Christ appeared to many different witnesses on many different occasions following his resurrection. We read of several such appearances here. Most notably we are here reminded that seeing cannot be believing for Christians today. We accept our Lord's resurrection by faith. **"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."**

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15 (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 187 (Red Hymnal)

"Christ Is Arisen"

The Sermon – Text: 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 (Printed on the back of this bulletin)

"Mop-Up Action"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 196 (Stanzas 1-2, 5) (Red Hymnal)

"I Am Content! My Jesus Liveth Still!"

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 193 (Stanzas 1, 4-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Christ the Lord is Ris'n Today"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (62) Average (43)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Mon-Wed	-9:00 a.m.	– CLC Board Meetings in Eau Claire
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Nathanael Mayhew has accepted the call to Immanuel of Mankato. Teacher Ross Kok has returned the call to Berea of Inver Grove Heights. Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac has called Teacher Claire Naumann. St Peter's of Iron River and Calvary of Marquette have applied for a seminary graduate. One pastoral candidate is scheduled to graduate from the ILC Seminary this spring. Pastor Em. David Lau fell asleep in the Lord on Wednesday of this past week.

Pastor Out of Town – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend synodical board meetings in Eau Claire this week, leaving after church this morning and returning Wednesday evening.

After Banquet Party – The Women's Fellowship will again be collecting donations for the After Banquet Party at ILC. This is a worthy cause that provides the students at ILC with an enjoyable and wholesome way to spend their time after the Spring Banquet. Donations can be given to Carolyn Johnson or Angela Pfennig. Please see Cindy Ollenburger for more information.

High School Visitor's Day – Immanuel Lutheran High School in Eau Claire, WI will host their annual High School Visitors Day on Friday, April 26, 2024, for students grades 7 and up. A schedule of events and online registration can be found at www.ilc.edu. Please register students and chaperones by Friday, April 19.