



Today the grave has lost its sting

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
April 26, 2009 Easter 3 1 John 1:1-4

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in Hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

It isn't often that a national news magazine has an article about two pastors – one of them Lutheran – one of them non-denominational. What do they have in common? Both of them were pastors in suburban Denver ten years ago. Both of them ten years later – are not pastors of their parish – making sermons every Sunday morning--*any more*. It is hard to believe – it was ten years ago – that two young men went to their high school in Littleton and started taking the lives of students and a teacher. One of the pastors was the pastor of one of the shooters. What would you do – when his parents ask you to have a private service with them? What would you say – what *could* you say – standing beside his casket? It is at the most painful and difficult and overwhelming times of our lives that God's Word makes all the difference in the world. It is at the most painful and difficult times that we need to remember what the apostle Paul told the Corinthians. **We have this treasure – the Gospel – in jars of clay – weak and breakable containers--to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us!** At the most difficult times we remember – **the wages of sin is death!** There is death in this world – because of sin. Physical death can come at any moment! Do you read the papers? Do you listen to the radio? This past week – a dad – who it appears had too much alcohol to drink – was driving a car full of children in a terrible rain storm – when he tried to use his cell phone, too! Off the road he went – not into a ditch – but into water – where a whole bunch of little children drowned! This week a physician was walking his dog – when he got run over and he died. This week a young man – just 24 years old was playing soft ball – *soft ball* – sliding into home. Here comes the throw. He gets hit in the neck – just behind his ear – by his carotid artery. He got up – then collapsed. Soon it was discovered he was brain dead! Physical death can come at any time. Eternal life – is a gift only Jesus can give. The Easter Gospel means:

Jesus Is The Word Of Life!

1. *We have the truth*
2. *We have precious fellowship*

The part of God's Word we are concentrating on today is part of three letters the Holy Spirit breathed into the heart and mind of the apostle John. There is no disciple quite like the apostle John. John who humbly refers to himself in his Gospel simply as **the disciple Jesus loved**. There is no Gospel like the Gospel of John – which records not just what Jesus did – but especially so much of what Jesus said. Again and again – the language – the words are so simple – the meaning and the implications so very profound! Things like, **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not understood it."** [John 1:1-5](#) Think about it. Jesus' words to Nicodemus, **"You must be born again!"** And again, **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** [John 3:16](#) And again, **"I am the Good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."** [John 10:11](#) And again, **"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."** [John 13:34](#) And again, **"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going...I am the Way, the Truth and the Life!"** [John 14:1-6](#) Near the end of your Bible are some very short letters – 1st, 2nd and 3rd John. First John is just 5 chapters long – just 105 verses. 2nd John is one chapter – just 13 verses and 3rd John – is one chapter – just 14 verses. That's just 132 verses – to read all three letters. At first glance – they may seem simple – even simplistic. But consider the profound implication of the verse: **God is love**. It's not a Barney the Purple Dinosaur verse. It is the essence of the Creator God – the Almighty. **God is love**. He isn't the angry Judge – the Vindictive Punisher – who lashes out from Heaven to squash the sinner like some annoying bug. **God is love**. For people – sinful human beings – love is something we strive for. The last time I drove through Madison – there was a sign – as big as a bus – it was literally pasted on the side of a city bus. It read – it said – *This Sunday morning – sleep in!* Brought to you by the *Freedom from Religion* people! I'm trying to preach and teach and share God's love – and these people have made it their calling – to encourage people to sleep right through one of the most precious opportunities to hear the Gospel. I need to love these people – and yet again and again I fail! **God is love!** It isn't something He's pretty good at. It isn't something He does very well. It is His essence. Dissect Him – take Him apart if you could – and what you find through and through is love! He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked – but that the wicked would turn from his sin and be saved! Jesus wants tax collectors and sinners – people who punch themselves in the chest – ashamed to look up at Heaven – to spend eternity at His table with Him! 1st, 2nd and 3rd John talk about the powerful truth, **God is love!**

In the part of Scripture we are concentrating on John talks about the essence of Easter. The Easter Gospel is what the sermon was about last Sunday – and for the next few weeks – leading up to Ascension and Pentecost. **"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life."** The One who was from the beginning is Jesus. Before the creation of the world – the Trinity existed – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Not everyone believes that either! Half way through Madison – the way I go to the hospitals there – is the Unitarian Universalist Church. Unitarian is the opposite of Trinitarian. They reject the

Biblical truth that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit – three Persons yet one God. So what do they do when they have Church? They talk about *making this world a better place*. There was a Unitarian Church the other day – where when they met – the Pastor passed out crisp new \$100 bills to many of the members. The idea was – come back next week – like the faithful steward and tell what you did with the money. One bought materials to make quilts to warm the homeless. One used the money to advertise – to ask for donations to help the needy. One bought bulk food and divided it up into smaller packages – to give to the hungry. Each person returned the next week – to report on acts of selfless generosity – and the poor people they had helped. Everyone testified to the warm and wonderful feeling they felt – when they put their heart-felt effort into helping someone in genuine need. And that’s nice. *It’s nice to be nice to the nice*. But it isn’t a fruit of faith – a result of saving faith in Jesus – the eternal Son of God – our Redeemer!

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The disciples – Peter, Andrew, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew the Tax Collector, Thomas the Doubter – all of the disciples were eye witnesses of all that Jesus began to do and to teach during the brief 3 years of Jesus’ public ministry. They tasted the water that Jesus had turned into the most wonderful wine anyone had ever tasted! They saw people horribly disfigured by leprosy – suddenly with skin so soft and perfect a little baby would have envied it. They saw a woman possessed by 7 demons – set free – to follow Jesus and serve him. They had been on the Sea of Galilee – when a storm was swamping their boat – waves splashing them – blinding them in the wind and rain. And they were there when Jesus said, **“Peace! Be still!”** And the lake was like a piece of glass. They had seen Jesus walk on the water. Had tasted the barley bread and salted fish until they were full. They had picked up the baskets full of leftovers and eaten them, too! They had been in that upper room with the doors locked for fear of the Jews – when suddenly Jesus stood among them and said, **“Peace be with you!”** And they had felt Jesus’ breathe on them saying, **“Receive the Holy Spirit!”** They had been with Thomas when Jesus said, “Reach out your hand to touch my hand. Put your finger where the nail was hammered through. Put your finger here – where the spear pierced my side. **Stop doubting and believe!”**

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. *Fellowship* is a closeness that we celebrate. Sometimes we have that fellowship – like last Saturday at St. Matthew’s in Oconomowoc – when members of the *Lutheran Women’s Missionary Society* heard about the Gospel in Nigeria. It has been said Nigeria is the happiest place in the whole wide world. A greater percent of people in Nigeria say they are truly happy than any other country in the world. This cannot be because people in Nigeria have more “things and stuff” than we who live in America. We have walk-in closets – and they have barely the wrapper – the cloth wrapped around their waist and the shirt they wear – the one pair of trousers they wear – and the T-shirt they wear. We have racks to hold all our shoes – and they have a single pair – three sizes too large – and no socks. We have two and three car garages – they have a family motorbike – with three filthy spark plugs – and a wine bottle of filthy petrol. We have refrigerators with doors full of sauce – while they eat free range chickens – *malnourished* chickens – and they eat the chicken bones – because the bones contain nutrients. We live in a country plagued by insomnia – acid indigestion – and tension headaches – the abuse of prescription drugs and alcohol and tobacco and recreational drugs – and they are content. They are happy because they know that on average – their physical life will end before age 47 or 48 in this world – because of accidents or malaria or diseases that result from their

malnutrition and lack of medical care. But they will live forever with Jesus in Heaven. And this anticipation of the forever joy and happiness of Heaven already gives them joy and confidence—here and now! We have fellowship with the people of *Christ the King* and *All Saints Lutheran Church of Nigeria*. Although you may not have Lord's Supper with them in this world—we will be with them forever in Heaven!

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. I read an article the other day—20 Things You Don't Know About...Death. It says there are at least 200 euphemisms for death. Things like "pushing up daisies" and "passed on" and "kicked the bucket" and I can never keep straight if you "bought the farm" to buy a grave plot—or "sold the farm" 'cause you can't farm any more—you can "sleep with the Tribbles"—if you get blasted by photon torpedoes from *Star Trek*. Sometimes physicians will say "someone expired!" I always think that sounds like a coupon at the grocery store—and in the fine print at the very bottom it's no good any more. *I hate when that happens.* Sometimes physicians won't even say you expired! They will look very sad and say, "I'm sorry—we did everything we could..." You know what that means. They tried—but the damage was too great. The best they could do wasn't enough. The fact is—ultimately—every physician will lose every patient—until the day comes when they die, too! The fact is—here in Church we aren't afraid to say dead. We aren't afraid to say died—because we can also say—when you believe in Jesus—death is not the end. Jesus is the Lord of Life. When we die we don't just go to a better place. I will never forget the time one of our members said—"I'm not afraid to die. I know I will go to a better place." The nurse said—"Don't be afraid to say it—you will go to heaven! That's where you will go—to Heaven!"

We write this to make our joy complete. It has been 10 years—since the terrible mass shooting at a school near Denver. Another pastor had a difficult time. It was for him to have a funeral for a young lady—who had had a very difficult time in recent years—being involved in painful hurtful harmful sins. But of late—her life had turned around. And then—that fateful day—trying to hide under a table—she was confronted by a young man who asked her if she believed in Jesus or not. She said she did—and he took her life. You probably don't wake up in the morning—thinking today I'm going to be asked if I love Jesus or not. And if I say I do—it could cost me my physical life. But it is possible. The truth is—the end of our physical life can only come when Jesus allows it. And if he does—he will take us home to heaven where our joy will be more complete than we can possibly imagine. We will never have pain or sickness or sadness again. The possibility of sin and death will not exist. We will be safe and we will be home. Amen!

To God alone all glory!

Rev. Anthony L. Schultz