

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fifth Sunday after Easter, May 5, 2013

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 396, 296:1, 605, 416, 412.

Lessons: Psalm 110, Revelation 20:7-15, Luke 24:13-26.

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 15:24-34.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Don't many people think that every human being has a choice when it comes to the kind of life he chooses to live? They would think that a human can choose to live a life which only satisfies himself, and does only what pleases himself or herself; OR the alternative would be to live a 'good life', a life on a higher level than just living for oneself, perhaps thinking of some kind of service to fellow mankind. In its simplest terms, many think that a person can choose to be good or evil.

And why be "good"? *"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."* In those words from our sermon text Paul is quoting Isaiah 22:13: *"'Let us eat and drink,' you say, 'for tomorrow we die!'"*. Isaiah wrote those words by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost at a time when God's people were facing destruction. They had forgotten their hope and saw only hopelessness.

As we make application of that to the days in which we live, don't we see many living in just that way? *"Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!"* In every age, in every generation, people can make excuse that things are going so poorly that we may as well live it up and live for ourselves, for there is nothing to live for.

Think about some of the horrible things that faced the generations of people sitting in this room. 'The Japanese and the Germans are going to destroy us and cruelly rule the world.' 'The Communist Chinese are going to rule the world.' 'The atomic bomb and the hydrogen bomb will destroy the world any day now.' 'I'm going to have to fight in this nasty war in Viet Nam.' 'My boyfriend will have to go off to war.' 'The economy is so terrible that there is no way I will get ahead and get all I want out of life.' 'Terrorists could totally destroy our way of life.' And who knows what horrors will face mankind tomorrow?

With those kinds of things facing us, we may as well 'eat, drink, and be merry'. Live it up! Right? There is no hope! Why obey any authority? Human life has no value. So what if I catch incurable diseases! So what if I take what I want! Why think about anyone else? There is no tomorrow, so I may as well get everything I can out of life today.

Don't you see and hear evidence of that attitude every day?

Those who think that every human has a choice – by himself or by herself – to do good or to do evil is forgetting one essential fact. Sin. Unregenerate, unconverted mankind, mankind without Jesus Christ has only one choice. That is the choice to sin, to do evil. And we must admit that if that were the only choice mankind EVER had there would be no reason to hope for anything better.

The Word of God – and, we must admit, our own experience – prove that things haven't gotten better even since our birth, no matter what our age. Psalm 51:5 is plain: *"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."*(NIV) *"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."* (KJV) Yes, we must admit that sin is the universal curse of all mankind.

We started last week's sermon with the following words, but they are certainly worth repeating as a Godly contradiction to the attitude we have just talked about, repeating them every day of our lives: (1 Corinthians 15:20)

“CHRIST HAS INDEED BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD.”

1. **The end of all things will come when Christ has “destroyed all dominion, authority, and power”.**
2. **“If the dead are not raised at all” why do believers in Christ endanger themselves and suffer?**

Paul makes it clear when the end will come. *“Then the end will come, when [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For [Christ] must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”*

We recognize that Christ has all power when we conclude the Lord’s Prayer with the words “For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever.”

Death and the devil have power in this world, though not unlimited power. Christ is more powerful. He has most assuredly been raised from the dead. And in him is our hope. We started our sermon listing some of the kinds of things we COULD be hopeless about. But never forget that *“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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”* (John 3:16-18)

In the prophecy you heard from our Old Testament lesson, David speaks of The LORD God telling David’s Lord – Jesus Christ – *“Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”* (Psalms 110:1) In our epistle lesson from Revelation you heard about Satan and all his powers being subject to Jesus Christ at the time of the final judgment.

Our text is speaking of believers who will rise to eternal life at the last, the end, the second coming of Jesus Christ. Then at his second coming he will hand over *“the kingdom to God the father after he has destroyed all dominion and authority and power”*.

“All dominion, authority and power” will be destroyed when, in one moment, the judgment trumpets will sound, and this world’s history will come to a sudden, fiery end. That will be the end of the godless, sinful rule of mankind and Satan over the world. The ungodly will also be brought back to life, but not to glory. They will meet their judge, who will send them and all their works to eternal damnation.

On that day Christ will turn over his kingdom to his heavenly father. This will come as no surprise to those who know that the Son was sent by his Father to accomplish the salvation of the world and to establish his kingdom, the church. When the last chapter of human history has been written, Christ will offer to his heavenly father the trophies of his victory and the spoils of his triumph. Every enemy, even that last great enemy, death, will have been overcome and put under his feet. Satan, the arch-enemy of Christ, and all the powers allied with him in opposition to God, must be brought to complete subjection and humiliation under Christ. The last enemy that shall be rendered absolutely powerless is death. When the resurrection is complete on the last day, the power of death will be forever ended and there will no longer be such a thing as dying or as being dead. With his mission accomplished, his victory won, the Son will turn over his kingdom to his Father and will reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit eternally.

The Son will place himself under God, the Father, who put everything, except himself, under his Son. As the God-man, who took on human flesh and blood and became one of us, he places himself under his father in the free submission of love. As the eternal son of God he is equal to the Father and will reign with him as his equal. Both the following passages are true. Jesus said in John 10:30: *“I and the Father are one.”* And he said in John 14:28: *“I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.”*

Paul asks for himself and for all believers, for all who confess Christ as their Savior from sin: *“why do we endanger ourselves every hour?”* Why would Christians suffer and risk their lives for Christ and his message if there is no resurrection of the dead? If the dead don’t rise, why endure a life of suffering for Christ? Why daily risk persecution for your faith? Why risk martyrdom – as many Christians did – just because you are a Christian?

Take away a Christian's hope of a future life with Christ, and then the misery and tribulation of this present life becomes unbearable. Paul emphasizes this point with the greatest vehemence: Daily I am dying; on account of the many dangers besetting me. I am always on the brink of death. There was not a day, not an hour

of the day, in which he might not expect to be seized and led forth to his execution. And to arouse the Corinthians to a realization of the meaning he wishes to convey, he adds the solemn oath: ***"I die every day--I mean that, brothers--just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

Paul writes of fighting ***"wild beasts in Ephesus"*** but the best explanation is that he is describing his battles with bloodthirsty, wicked humans. He was a Roman citizen who could not be thrown to the lions. Scripture has no record of any incident in which Paul was condemned to fight wild beasts in an arena.

Believe me, Paul says, I wouldn't be risking my life day after day if I had no hope of my resurrection and of being in glory with Christ. I mean that brothers just as surely as I always thank God for you because of his grace given to you in Christ Jesus.

If there is no resurrection, then one might as well live like people behave in the wicked, unbelieving world: "let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." Then we might as well enjoy ourselves as much as we can before death.

Aren't there many people who are doing just that? They are living in such a way as to gratify lusts of the flesh as if they will live forever, or mankind will find solutions to any diseases that they might encounter.

But Paul sharply warns against this way of life. The Corinthians should not follow the example of their pagan neighbors – nor should we! ***"Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God--I say this to your shame."*** Shame on them if they live like the heathen!

Paul also quotes the Greek poet Menander as a sort of proverb which probably everyone recognized: ***"Bad company corrupts good character."*** The kind of companions you spend time with – in any way, at any time – affects you. You surely all remember the proverb about a rotten apple corrupting the whole barrel, starting with those closest to it. Think of all those influences that are not God-pleasing examples, be it personal influences, the movies you see, the music you listen to, the games you play, the books you read, the television you watch. It DOES all have an influence on you. The older you are, the easier it is to think of things such as television programs which you thought were horrible when they first appeared, and now are so easy to watch. For your children, please remember that what is on prime-time evening television now will be after-school television in just a few years. Beware, Paul warns, also against the philosophies of the world. Beware of the "live it up now, for things will only get worse" philosophies!

Paul holds up a stern finger of warning: Do not be seduced! Do not let any one mislead you! Evil conversations, evil companionships, corrupt good manners. If a person flirts with temptation in the company of people whose values are not Christian, his moral nature is bound to suffer. His character will be undermined by evil talk; his honesty and reputation will be identified as the same as the evil people with whom he keeps company.

We believe, and confess regularly in the Creed: ***"Christ has indeed been raised from the dead."*** (1 Corinthians 15:20) And because Christ has been raised, we, too, shall rise and with all believers receive everlasting life. Then ***"the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "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. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."*** (1 Corinthians 15:54-58) May each of us live for Christ and for one another! Amen.