

SERMON FOR JULY 30, 2017

TEXT: REVELATION 21:5

THEME: THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS

⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

In the name of Jesus:

Jaroslav Pelikan was a Lutheran pastor who spent his career as a university professor. He is known as a Lutheran scholar and he was a prolific writer but perhaps his last words are his most important words. Pelikan died in 2006 of lung cancer, but his last words were his greatest words. Pelikan said: “If Christ is risen, then nothing else matters. And if Christ has not risen, then nothing else matters.”

These words express the empty despair and the joyful certain resurrection hope. Pelikan, as do all believers, pinned his hope on the certainty of Jesus’ resurrection. Everything hinges on the resurrection of Jesus. Everything else in all of creation is of a secondary importance to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Pelikan’s words echo the Apostle Paul’s words of I Corinthians 15: “If Christ has not been raised then your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

Imagine, for a moment, that if the second part of Pelikan’s statement were true, what life for you and others would be like. Imagine what it would be like if Christ had not risen from the grave. If Jesus had not risen from the grave, then Jesus would have been an ordinary person, just like you and me. He would have been a good Teacher who lived, and then died. Nothing more and nothing less. You would be on your own to try to

save yourself, but powerless to do so, because Jesus would still be dead, lifeless, laying in a grave.

Nothing else matters if Christ had not rose from the grave. Your life would end in death. You would have no hope for eternity or an afterlife. Every possible remedy for death would be meaningless. Why? Because in the end you would still die. All you would be doing is putting off the inevitable. The old Epicurean philosophy would hold true: eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die. If Jesus was still dead your life would be a pitiful march toward death. No answer, no cure, no hope for death. Just death.

So modern medicine would give you no hope and answer to death. Why? Because no matter the medical advancement, you would still die. If doctors would be able to cure cancer, you would still die from some other cause. Why try to squeak out a few more years here on earth when there is death awaiting you, with no hope for an afterlife?

Technology and the progress it would offer would be of little consolation to you. You could find solace in getting a new and better iphone, only to have the new one shattered when it is dropped on the ground, or wear out over time. The greatest technological advancement of the 20th century was the atomic bomb. Newer technology would give birth to a bigger, better bomb. So much for hoping in technology.

Remember the John Lennon song called Imagine? The words go like this:
“Imagine there's no heaven It's easy if you try
No hell below us Above us only sky
Imagine all the people Living for today...Imagine there's no countries It isn't hard to do

Nothing to kill or die for And no religion too Imagine all the people
Living life in peace...

What a pie in the sky crock of an imagination! Any progress made toward peace is wiped out by a angry word, a bullet, or a bomb. And all of the money in the world won't cure what ails the world. The American dream has become getting a college education and paying off tens of thousands of dollars of debt. What a life!

Imagine what life would be like if Jesus had not risen from the grave? In the words of a French philosopher: "Live as long as you can, you shall by that nothing shorten the time that you are to lie dead." If Christ has not risen from the grave, then nothing else matters. You are still a sinner, dead in your sins, broken lives giving birth to more brokenness. Are you depressed yet?

You shouldn't be, because God's Good News is that Christ has risen from the grave! God's Good News is this: That God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son so that by believing in Jesus you might have the certainty of God's love and life by His name! ⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

In Jesus God has made all things new. Jesus is the One who ushers in God's new creation. The old creation of sin met its match in the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus throughout His ministry set about making all things new. Peace came to an old sea when Jesus calmed the waters. Hunger met its match when Jesus used leftover bread to feed

the multitudes. Lepers who were social outcasts were healed of their disease and brought back into their families. All throughout Jesus' life and ministry the brokenness of sin was healed by the power of the living Son of God in human flesh.

Ultimately, sin met its match in Jesus. For Jesus in His death paid the price that needed to be paid by offering Himself up as the Sacrifice for your sins and the sins of the world. There on the cross, God the Father poured out His wrath on Jesus, His perfect, sinless, Son. There in the empty tomb God raised Jesus from the dead, bringing life and immortality to life.

God gives you new life in Christ. For you were once dead in your trespasses and sins. But now you have been saved by a free gift of God's love, saved by grace, through faith in Christ, this is not of your own doing, it is a gift of God. A gift you received in your Baptism. A gift that is presented to you today as you hear once again God's Good News of His love for you in Jesus. A gift you receive with your mouth as the body and blood of Christ are placed on your lips for your forgiveness and salvation.

Nothing else matters more to you than the new life that God has given to you in Jesus Christ. Nothing! Being Lutheran means that we believe and confess that you have new life, eternal life, by God's grace through faith in Jesus. This new life in Jesus changes everything. As Luther so aptly put it: If this teaching is lost, that you are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus, if this is lost, then all of Christendom is lost. You are made new by grace through faith in Christ. This Good News changes everything! For God's grace is for you, today. Right here and now. Jesus makes you new today. Not tomorrow, not in the future, but today. In Christ you are a new person. Just as Jesus

gave the paralytic movement immediately, so Jesus gives you new life right here and right now. The way you relate to your family, your neighbor, your co workers, is forever changed, immediately and forever, because of Jesus.

You now have hope. Not pie in the sky hope, but real, lasting hope. God is on your side. You know for certain that God loves you and He will work everything out in your life to your good and His glory because of Jesus. Jesus gives you hope, now and into eternity. And with hope comes confidence, for no matter what has happened to you in the past, no matter what you have done, your relationship and standing with God is firm and certain, because Jesus lived, died, and rose for you to give you new life. Right here and right now!

And because God has done all of this, you can thank God and give Him the glory He deserves. You did nothing to get saved, God saved you as a free gift of His love. As Luther wrote in the Small Catechism: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, for the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and now it is by duty to thank, praise, serve and obey God."

I don't know what the future will hold for you. Will you live another ten years? Will you have a job next year? What will happen if we have another world war or terrorism increases? No one knows the future. As uncertain as the future is for the human race, you can know for certain that your future is secure in Jesus. Your future is as secure as the empty tomb. Poverty, cancer, terrorism, unemployment don't own your future. Jesus holds your future, for Jesus is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. So

you can face the future with confidence and joy! For in Jesus your sins are forgiven, your salvation is secure, and nothing will ever separate you from His love. You have new life in Christ. Nothing else matters.

Amen