

SERMON FOR APRIL 29, 2020

TEXT: PSALM 116: 1-6

THEME: THE COMMON DENOMINATOR

I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. ² Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. ³ The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. ⁴ Then I called on the name of the Lord: "O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!" ⁵ Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful. ⁶ The Lord preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me.

In the name of Jesus:

Math was one of my favorite subjects when I was growing up. When I entered college I first enrolled in engineering, but I met my match in math when I enrolled in classes such as Calculus and Linear Algebra and Differential Equations. What I really enjoyed in math were the simpler problems, such as finding a common denominator when working with numbers and fractions.

When you find the common denominator in math, it makes working with fractions easier. And when you find a common denominator in life, that common denominator can simplify the most complex of relationships in life.

As we are all living in these times of trying to stay at home and even work from home, our television sets are usually tuned into the latest news coronavirus update, from either the President of the United

States or our Governor. These updates share some commonalities; there are updates on people hospitalized or infected with the disease, people who have recovered from the disease, and sadly, people who have died from the disease. Each and everyday we have been confronted, whether we like it or not, with the news of death; deaths in far away places, deaths in our community, and a disease that can cause death. No matter what we listen to, read or watch, we are seemingly confronted with death.

Death is the great common denominator. The Bible puts it this way: the wages of sin is death. Death has spread to all people. We don't like to think about death, we don't like to talk about death; death is usually a subject that is taboo in our culture. But its there, and what we have experienced in the past several weeks proves the fact that death is the great common denominator for every person. The soul that sins must die. You and I must die, we will die, and we can't escape it. At some point in time we all have to deal with it. The death of a loved one, and our own death.

I read with interest recently a book written by one of the world's experts on infectious disease. The name of the book is called: Deadliest Enemy: Our War Against Killer Germs. It was written a couple of years

ago by Michael Osterholm, who is an international expert on infectious disease. In this book Osterholm actually wrote about and predicted the global pandemic that we are experiencing now. It is downright fascinating in his accuracy and ability to predict how a pandemic like this could even take place, what steps we would need to take to combat it, and how we can prepare for it in the future.

I was struck, though, by what he said as a public health official. He wrote that it was the goal of public health not to prevent death, for to prevent death would be impossible. The goal of public health would not even be to prevent the leading so called causes of death, such as lung cancer or heart disease. According to Osterholm, what officials in the sphere of public health are always trying to do is prevent early and needless death and disease. So in essence, there are two goals in public health, one is to prevent death, and when that is not possible, it is to minimize disease. And it is towards that end that public health policies are put into place for the general overall health of the populace.

What struck me though, was the differentiation the author makes, saying that the goal is to replace bad deaths with good deaths. So, to simplify, a good death would be a death where a person dies of old age and a bad death is a death of a person who dies at a younger age. On

the one hand, we all want, I think to live a long, happy and healthy death. None of us envision dying at an early age. None of us wishes that someone younger than us would die. But when you think about it, it takes our breath away when we even start thinking about or talking about good deaths and bad deaths, because in the end, no one wants to die, no one wants a loved one to die, and death is not only the opposite of life it is the enemy of life.

There is really no good death. All deaths are bad, because we are sinners and sin pays off with death. This is what the Psalmist means when he writes: “³ the snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish.” The snares of death surround us. The fear of death has a hold of us. We walk daily through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Death certainly causes us to suffer in distress and anguish.

But God’s Good News is that He does not desire the death of anyone! He wants the sinner to live! God loves us with an everlasting love. God has heard our cries in our despair and anguish over death and He has delivered us from death! How? By sending His one and only Son to taste our death and die the death we deserve to die because of our sin.

The Bible says that cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree. God the Father cursed His Son Jesus on Calvary's cross, pouring out all of His anger, punishment and wrath that we deserve because of our sinful disobedience. Christ came face to face with death on His cross, suffering Hell in your place and mine. Then, three days later Christ rose from the grave, showing that the death could not hold Him in the grave. The Angels announce God's Good News to you that Christ is risen! God has heard our cry when we call on the Lord: "O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!" Gracious is the Lord, says the Psalmist, Gracious, righteous; and merciful. ⁶The Lord preserves the lowly, and when we are brought low by death, He saves us in the victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God gives you this victory in your Baptism. When you have been baptized into Christ, you have put on Christ. Christ victory has been given to you in your Baptism, it is yours, His life is now your life, and your life is hidden in Christ with God. You are assured of eternal life in Christ for whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved. Death has now no hold over you. Because of Christ's good death on the cross and His glorious resurrection your death has been turned into a pathway to eternal life with God! You can sing with the Apostle Paul that death has

been swallowed up in victory! And we can thank God for giving us that victory over death in Jesus Christ His Son.

And it is because of the victory over death that Jesus gives that we are able to sing with the Psalmist: I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.² Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. What shall I render to the Lord for all of His benefits to me?"

If you were to travel to the Southern states, you might hear the phrase: "Much obliged." People in the South use it whenever they want to say thank you. Instead of saying thank you, they say, "Much obliged." What a great expression, this attitude becomes the new common denominator for the people of God, in that we are to thank the Lord, we are obligated to thank Him, for He has saved us from death and given us eternal life because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. May God give us such an attitude and faith, so that we use our lives to thank, praise, serve and obey God, for He has given us victory over death in His Son Jesus Christ, to whom be all glory, honor, and praise. Amen