

"Dying to See God!" ~ 1 Corinthians 15:19-20

The Day of Epiphany

6 January Anno Domini 1998

The Funeral Sermon for Geri Conrad
Pastor Michael L. McCoy
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Emmett, Idaho

Grace, mercy and peace to you, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Dear family members, friends, neighbors, members of the community, and members of the Family of God here at Our Redeemer Congregation and especially you, Bill ...

There is a philosophy of life that has echoed down through the centuries and is proclaimed in every age. It is based upon the assumption that this life that we live now is all that there is - that there is nothing after you die. This philosophy is expressed and heard in the writings of thinkers, the songs of humanity, and the commercials of the advertising world.

In many and various ways, the phrase, "Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" has been expressed. Roman poet, Horace, wrote *Carpe Diem* - "Seize the day." A song from the sixties reminds those of us from the age of the Golden Oldies as the female vocalist sang the question, "Is That All There Is?", and then answered it, "If that's all there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing -- let's break out the booze and have a ball, if that's all there is." Commercials and advertisements tell us to live for the now and grab for all the gusto you can.

The common theme is based on the assumption that when we die, everything ends -- the body begins to dissolve into its basic elements, the spirit evaporates into the winds of this world, and the soul ceases to exist after the last heartbeat. Nothing and no one, according to this belief system, experiences any sort of afterlife. Neither heaven nor hell exist. It all just ends. As a result, we should simply enjoy this life that we live by indulging ourselves. Or, "Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

We may be surprised to discover this possibility being offered in the Bible. The Apostle Paul writes to the people of God at Corinth: *If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."* If there is no Paradise, no heaven, no hell, no resurrection, then we might as well just live for today. That may surprise us until we realize that it is in a conditional statement ... a contrary-to-fact statement. Paul's words, in the famous 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians, focus on the teaching of the Resurrection ... a foundational doctrine of Christianity.

On this day, when we are reminded of death and the departure of Geri from us, we do well to reaffirm the truth of the Easter Resurrection of the Lord Jesus and, consequently, our own

resurrection. We do so on the basis of the sermon text 1 Corinthians 15:19-20. Please listen to those two verses under the theme of "*Dying to See God*"

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Thus far the inspired and inerrant Word of the Lord our God.

First, we consider the word, *IF*. *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable*. In this discussion of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the *IF* is absolutely huge -- a balance upon which the hangs. *If* Christ has not been raised, then the message of Christianity is empty. Churches have no proclamation to make except, well, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." *If* Easter morning is a lie, then this congregation, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, has no reason for existing. *If* Jesus did not rise from the dead, then I have no words of comfort for you today at all, Bill. *If* the Incarnate Son of God is still buried in a tomb, then Geri's confession of sins that she made on her deathbed was futile, as also would be the announcement of complete and total forgiveness that she heard the other day.

That same day, Geri heard a confession of the Christian faith ... the Apostles' Creed ... a statement of faith which includes the words, "I believe ... in Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; on the third day He rose again from the dead." She listened again to the words, "I believe ... in the Resurrection of the body and the Life everlasting." When asked, on the brink of her entry into eternity, if this is what she believed, she replied, "Yes." However, *If* He did not rise again from the dead, then her faith is futile and we might just as well have hung our heads in despair and walked out of her room.

Paul summed up what the consequences are in our sermon text. *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable*. Permit me to paraphrase that rather roughly.

"If, in this life that we Christians live on this earth that lasts an average of 70 years, a life in which we have invested ourselves in believing and trusting the Incarnate Son of God as our Redeemer and Savior, ... if it is only for this life of strokes and phlegm, heart attacks and fever, cancer and car crashes, abortion and ebola, pall bearers and Parkinson's ... if it is only for this life that we have placed our hope in Christ, we Christians are the most miserable men and the most pitiful people who ever walked the face of this earth. We might as well throw up our hands and join the others who encourage people to eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

If Christ is not risen, then what silliness we are advocating. The height of such futility and folly for us Christians is when we ascend to our deathbeds and in the last hour inhaling our final breath while holding onto an illusion. A Christianity without a risen Christ and without the sure and certain hope of our own resurrection from the grave, whatever people may say praising Christianity's moral influence and lauding Christianity's good works, is the worst.

Second, we consider the word, *BUT*. *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead*. This is the "huge however" that makes all the difference in this world as well as in the next world; the "marvelous however" that causes everything to turn completely around. Christ is risen! The Son of God, Who died the sin-atoning death on

Calvary's cross for all people, is alive! The tomb, where they placed the lifeless Body of the Lord God Almighty, is empty! This is objective truth, dear people ... it is historical fact ... and whether it is believed or not, it is true. *BUT now Christ is risen from the dead.*

But Christ is risen and we are no longer in our sins. His death paid the eternal price for every one of Geri's sins, everyone of your sins, everyone of mine, as well as each and every human being who ever has, is now, or ever will live. His Resurrection from the dead demonstrates the victory and demonstrates that our faith is not futile. The Gospel of God, the Good News of Jesus, is that salvation is yours and mine by the grace of God through faith in His Son as our Redeemer. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. We end up dying to see God.

Geri prayed the Lord's Prayer, including the petition requesting God to deliver her from evil ... "that our Father in heaven would deliver us from every evil of body and soul, ... and finally, when our last hour has come, grant us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven." On New Year's Day, God answered her prayer when she fell asleep in Christ.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Our resurrection from the dead is dependent upon Christ's Resurrection. What Jesus said in the Gospel of St. John is absolutely true. You remember the words. Inscribe them on your soul. *I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.* Because He lives, we also shall live. Job declared not only that he knew that his Redeemer lived, but that he, Job, would be raised from the dead and his eyes would behold the Lord.

The third word is *THEREFORE*. As a result of Christ being risen, *therefore* we have hope ... not a hope-so hope, but a know-so hope. *Therefore*, we know that this life is not the end of existence, but rather, the prelude to eternity. *Therefore* the Christian may face the future knowing that God is there and has taken care of all things. *Therefore*, only a day before she fell asleep in Christ, Geri could look into the eyes of her husband and say, without numbing despair haunting her, without any fear terrorizing her, ... and say in bold faith, "I am dying."

The Apostle Paul wrote of this Spirit-wrought confidence in these beautiful words: *I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Therefore, the message of the Church is Christ crucified and risen for you, and therefore, is one of inviting truth, and today you are being encouraged to consider it carefully.

If you are not a Christian, then please think carefully about all that you have seen and heard, as it has been told to you. Are you going to live with the philosophy of eating and drinking for tomorrow you die? Or, will you abandon the manmade -isms of this world and take refuge in Jesus and His glorious cross and His sin-atonement wounds suffered on your behalf and for your eternal good? The Church of Jesus lifts high the cross and proclaims the message of peace and hope to the world, you included.

If you are already a Christian, then your call is to do what Geri did ... to remain faithful unto death ... to believe, trust, hold dearly, confess, and proclaim the Good News until you are called to be with the Lord in Paradise. Indeed, *if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most*

pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Dear people of the Lord, truly, we are *Dying to See God!*

Amen. Now may the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, now and here in time ... forever and there in eternity. Amen.