

"Why We Live"

John 14:15-21

May 17, 2017

6th Sunday of Easter

It is nice to have here today the young people in our congregation who are graduating from high school and either moving into the work force or going on to engage in higher education. Many graduating seniors throughout our country will go on to college this fall. But it wasn't always this way. Not everybody used to go to college. However, now it is felt that, if you want to be successful – get a good job and earn a lot of money – then acquiring the knowledge which college offers is essential. If you know enough information and earn the right academic degrees, then you will be a success and get what you want out of life.

However, that's not always true. There is a reality about success in life which you need to know whether you are planning to get a job after high school or are intending to go to college. And that reality is this: "It's not WHAT you know, but WHO you know." If you have a close personal relationship with someone who is rich and successful, then you can become rich and successful because of that relationship, even if the "book learning" is not all there. Conversely, even if you have great knowledge and many diplomas hanging on the wall, but you don't know somebody with influence on the inside, you may not succeed. Is it fair? Not always. But it's real.

This same principle applies to a far more important situation – the question of life and death. Why do we live? Why do we die? We'd like to think that we are in control and can determine who will live and prevent who will die. But the old adage applies here, too. In living and in dying, "It's not WHAT you know, but WHO you know."

Life is a gift from God. People act as if life here will go on forever. But people die. People get sick and die because of the disease. People grow old and die because their bodies deteriorate and fail them. People experience natural disasters (fires, floods, tornadoes, and so on) and human error (traffic accidents, murder, and so on) and die.

What's the natural human reaction to these deaths? We can fix this. If we can learn more about how to prevent and cure illnesses, then people need not die from them. If we can learn more about nutrition, exercise, and healthy life styles, then people need not age and die from that. If we can just learn more about climate change in order to prevent bad weather, people need not die in natural disasters. If we teach people to drive safer and not be so mean to each other, people wouldn't have to die from human error. It would be great – but impossible. Knowledge of information can't keep us from dying.

It's WHO you know that affects your life and hastens your death. And we know someone who does that, regardless of how much knowledge we have. That someone is Adam. Adam is the originator of that which causes all of the other problems I mentioned and the death that results – namely, sin. Sin – the violation of the commands of God in thought, word, or deed – corrupts and destroys all life.

If this had been a problem just for Adam and his wife, Eve, and somehow sin could have been quarantined, then we would have been fine. We would have known about their sin and that it caused their death and that would have been it. However, once again, "It's not WHAT you know, but WHO you know." And we know Adam. In fact, we are physically connected to Adam as his descendants. That means, the Bible says, that Adam's sinfulness has been transmitted throughout the generations to us. We share in his sinfulness and, because of that sinfulness, we commit our own sins. We do evil which the commands of God forbid. We fail to do good which the commands of God require.

This means that each of us here will ultimately receive what sin gives: death. We can't fix that or prevent that. Each of you, as well as me, will die. And it will be our fault. No matter how much knowledge we acquire in medicine, science, meteorology, and human psychology, that won't change. For, in this situation as in many others, in order to get anything, it doesn't matter what you know, but who you know. And since we know Adam, we get exactly what Adam had: death. It's as if Adam is calling out to us throughout the millennia, "Because I die, you will die also."

The Good News is that we also know someone else: Jesus Christ. The joy of the Easter season is not the colored eggs, the chocolate candy, the family dinners, and so on. It's not even the traditional Easter worship service with all the familiar Easter hymns. The joy of Easter is knowing Christ. That makes all the difference for us in a world where "it's not what you know but who you know."

Since we can't prevent death through the knowledge of science, medicine, psychology, or meteorology, we might think that we can achieve some relief from our situation here of sin and death by knowing the Bible better and trying harder to live by it and obey it. We may get the impression in confirmation class that the goal is to acquire more knowledge for knowledge's sake. So we try real hard to memorize the catechism and a multitude of Bible verses so that we'll "pass" confirmation and shine on confirmation day.

While we may feel we've achieved something by knowing the Bible and the catechism, we really haven't. Now, I'm not saying knowledge is bad but, again, it's a matter of what you know not being the most important thing. Knowing science, medicine, psychology, or meteorology is good but none of that knowledge can halt death. In the same way, simply knowing the Bible and catechism from cover to cover is good but none of that knowledge can get you to heaven. Remember the devil knows the Bible far better than any of us and he's spending eternity in hell.

The important thing here is WHO you know. And we know Jesus Christ. Jesus came to this world to bring forgiveness for sins, restoration with God, and life in heaven forever. By His death on the cross, he earned full forgiveness for all our sins. By His perfect life of obedience, He has obtained perfect holiness for us and has restored us to a right relationship with a holy God. By His resurrection from death to life, He has won eternal life for us with Him in heaven.

Like with Adam, we have a connection to Jesus Christ. However, it is not a physical connection but a spiritual connection. In your baptism, you were baptized into Christ. That means that God connected you to Jesus. And, not only to Jesus in general, but you were connected to Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

Just like being connected to Adam and knowing him means receiving his stuff: sin, condemnation, and death, so also being connected to Christ and knowing Him by faith means receiving His stuff: forgiveness, holiness and, most importantly, life. Jesus assures us in our text, "Because I live, you will also live."

The context is important here. Jesus is not asking them to view the future through rose colored glasses. They are to face some tough times ahead. On the night before He died, Jesus is telling His disciples that He is leaving them. He will die and rise and ultimately will ascend into heaven. He will no longer be visibly present with them. They will face suffering, persecution, and death. He is encouraging them not to worry or be afraid, even if they should face death. They cannot lose. He says, "Because I live, you will also live."

We face a similar situation now. There are tough times ahead. Jesus is not visibly present among us. We are facing suffering of various kinds, persecution for being faithful to Christ and His Word, and death, perhaps as part of the persecution for our faith or, at least, because of our connection to Adam and our sin. Christ continues to encourage us not to worry or be afraid. He speaks to us through time and space and says, "Because I live, you will also live."

That is why we live: because Christ lives. We live in Christ by faith. We live through Christ in the world. We live, not only physically, but spiritually as well. We live, not only for a while here on earth, but eternally in heaven as well. We live without worry or fear for nothing, not even death, can overcome us or defeat us.

This is what the joy of Easter is all about: life. Jesus lives. And, if that wasn't enough, we shall live, too. This joy is so huge that it cannot be fully celebrated in only one day. We have the 50 days of Easter to celebrate the joy more fully. So, celebrate the joy of Easter Day. Continue that celebration of joy for the entire Easter season. Live out the Easter joy every day of your life here on earth and forever with your Lord in heaven. For He lives and because He lives, you will live, too. Amen