

**Isaiah 25:6-9 + Turn to the Lord Who Lives + Series: Turn to the Lord
Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + Easter Dawn + 1 April 2018**

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It doesn't care how old you are. It doesn't care about the color of your skin or your gender. It doesn't care about where you came from or what language you speak. It doesn't care how much or how little money you have. It considers all people the same. Death strikes down young and old, man and woman, healthy and sick, strong and weak. Death ruins life.

Death is the scourge of every nation, tribe, culture, and people. We hate to talk about it. It leaves us uncomfortable and unsettled. It brings sorrow to everyone it meets. Death pursues every man, woman, and child relentlessly from womb to tomb, but today we don't celebrate death. We don't turn towards death and accept the relentless march of fate like the Stoics of old.

No, today we **TURN TO THE LORD WHO LIVES**. We turn to the Lord who conquers death. We turn to the Lord whose victory over death is also the victory of his saints—our victory. On this Easter morning, we celebrate what Jesus has done to death and what that means for our lives. Death has destroyed countless lives in every generation, but today the power of death is destroyed. Today death is “swallowed up” by Christ our Lord who lives.

No matter what generation you come from, how old you are, or what century you live in, we've all needed help. We all need rescue. We've all needed deliverance from the ancient enemy Death. The prophet Isaiah describes death as **“the burial shroud, the shroud over all the peoples, the sheet covering all the nations...”** A burial shroud covers what death has done to a human body. Death covers all of humanity like a shroud. By nature, we're either dead or dying. Yet death also covers us all with sorrow, grief, sadness, emptiness, pain, heartache, tears, and loss. No matter who you are, death affects you.

So why are we trapped beneath death's shroud? Why do we have to deal with the death of others while awaiting our own? When Adam and Eve first disobeyed God's holy command, he told them, **“You are dust and you will return to dust.”** (Genesis 3:19) That death was passed to their children and to their children and to every generation down to us today. Death has become the **“disgrace”** that marks all of us. It is the harshest, clearest preaching of God's Law because **“the wages of sin is death...”** (Romans 6:23a) By nature, we're either dead or dying—and every sin earns a little more death with a little more sting.

Death swallows life whole and does not return it. Death comes into the home or the hospital, the workplace or the classroom, the park or the playground and destroys life. Medicine and science may prolong life and remove some of life's hurts, but they cannot stop death. Death only causes grief and woe. Is it any wonder why death terrifies us so much?

That's why we all need help and deliverance. That's why the Lord sends his prophet Isaiah to show us something special. Isaiah leads us up God's holy mountain, and there we find an eye-popping banquet. The Lord of hosts has prepared **“for all the peoples a feast of choice meat, a feast with aged wine, prime cuts of choice meat, fine vintage wine.”**

Now why would God prepare such a feast? Have we done anything to deserve it? The simple answer is no. This feast before us is the feast of God's grace through Jesus. The Lord Almighty doesn't skimp when he provides. Instead he offers the best his love can give—rich compassion, savory forgiveness, refreshing life, and satisfying salvation. “Try this one!”, Isaiah tells you. You try a morsel of grace and you taste victory over death. “Try this one!”, the prophet urges. You try another morsel of grace and you taste freedom from death's power. “Try this one over here!” You try yet another morsel of grace and you taste comfort and healing for your grieving heart. You proceed to fill your plate with the finest delicacies of God's grace, but the best is yet to come. With a plate full of God's grace in hand, the prophet guides you over to your New Testament seat for a better view. Laid out before you is God's entire plan of salvation and you get to see it all play out.

You see the burial shroud of death roll out over the entire world as Adam and Eve fall into sin. You see them flee from the Garden of Eden, but not before hearing this golden promise. **“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel.”**

¹ “Christ is risen!” “He is risen indeed!” This is known as the *Paschal Greeting*, one of the oldest and most widespread traditions in the Christian church. Throughout the weeks of the Easter season, whenever the minister says to the people, “Christ is risen!”, they respond loudly and boldly, “He is risen indeed!”

(Genesis 3:15) Death rudely pushes its way into their lives and the lives of their family. Death swallows them up and countless generations after, but as the generations pass, the darkness cannot prevent the golden promise of the Savior from growing and expanding like the first rays of dawn. A blessing is coming to the nations. A Savior is coming in real time from a real family in a real place. He will face death. He will endure the worst death can throw at him, and yet he will stomp on death's throat once and for all. With each passing promise and each passing prophet, the golden promise grows and grows until it's Isaiah's turn to speak.

Isaiah points you to a messy scene. Over there a tomb stands cracked open and empty. Over here Satan lies crushed in the dust, and there the shroud of death, torn to pieces, is swallowed up by life. Walking away from it all, you see Christ the Conqueror. ***“On this mountain he will destroy the burial shroud, the shroud over all the peoples, the sheet covering all the nations; he will destroy death forever.”***

From our New Testament perch on that holy mountain with souls filled to satisfaction with God's grace, we see Jesus. We see a Savior who knew death from experience. We see Jesus experience the effects of death in a dying world. Yet Jesus never grieves helplessly over death. He defeats it.

You see Jesus stand in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Jairus. Death had taken their 12-year-old daughter, but the One who is truly God took her by the hand and gave her back alive to her parents. Death couldn't stop. The great shroud over all humanity starts to tear, but the best is yet to come.

You see Jesus walking towards a small town called Nain. A funeral procession is winding its way out of town to the cemetery. A young man had died. Tears of grief streak the cheeks of his widowed mother, but the One who has the power to give life dries her tears by telling her son to get up. Jesus gives him back alive to his mother, and death can do nothing about it. The shroud of death tears some more, but the best is yet to come.

You see Jesus stand before the tomb of his dear friend Lazarus and he weeps. Jesus weeps over what death has done again, but he does more than weep. The One who is ***“the Resurrection and the Life”*** commands Lazarus to come out of the tomb...and death can't hold him back. (John 11:25) The great shroud tears even more, but the best is yet to come.

You see Jesus nailed to a cross on a low hill, a ***“mountain”*** you could say, and there Jesus faces death head on. He suffers excruciating pain on the cross—the necessary payment for our sins—until finally he cries out, ***“It is finished!”*** and willingly gives up his spirit. On that Friday afternoon, death seems to win the final victory. Death seems to swallow up the Son of God, but remember the promise! ***“He will destroy death forever!”***

You see death do all it can to keep Jesus in the tomb for three days, but then Sunday comes! While Roman guards watch the tomb and Jesus' frightened disciples hide behind locked doors, an earthquake shakes everyone awake. An angel appears and removes the stone to reveal an empty tomb! Even 2,000 years later, we stand in awe at the emptiness of that tomb, emptiness that declares to all humanity throughout all of history past, present and future the words of the angel, ***“He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.”*** (Matthew 28:6)

You hear how Jesus appeared to the faithful women, to Mary, to Peter, to disciples on the road, to his disciples behind locked doors. You hear him tell Thomas, ***“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”*** (John 20:27) You hear Jesus tell the aged Apostle John decades later, ***“I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death...”*** (Revelation 1:18)

The words of the prophet echo down through the ages, ***“The Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from every face and remove his people's disgrace from the whole earth, for the LORD has spoken.”*** How has Jesus dried your tears over the years with comfort that only he can give? How has Jesus comforted and healed and helped you? He has! Yet this comfort isn't just for today!

The prophet speaks another promise—the promise of resurrection to come. A day is coming when the Lord will remove ***“his people's disgrace from the whole earth.”*** A day is coming when death will no longer have any mastery over us or our loved ones in the Lord. A day is coming when we will stand before the Lord holy and alive, body and soul because Jesus lives.

Now we are still dying souls living in a dying world, but Jesus lives, so what do we do? We keep partaking of the rich feast of his grace in Word and water and meal. We find comfort in the Christ who conquered death, who wipes away our tears of grief with his love, who heals us when death pays a visit. We find strength in the truth that because Jesus lives, we will too.

Yet we also yearn for the day when our Lord will return and wipe away our tears forever. We long to see our Savior in the flesh and reunite with our loved ones in the Lord. We long for the day when we will stand around the throne of the living Lamb of God with all the saints triumphant, raising our voices to sing that ancient song of victory, ***“Look, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he has saved us. This is the LORD, we have waited for him. Let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.”*** CIR HIRI! Amen.