DEATH OR LIFE?
Easter Sunday – John 10: 9-18 – April 12, 2020
The Church of the Covenant

The events of Holy Week always point to the stark contract between death and life. Between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Between the cross and the open tomb. Between the evil in this world and the goodness of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. “Because HE lives we shall live also!” (John 14: 19) When we think back just one short month we probably all remember when we first heard of the CoronaVirus coming to Washington County. It was Friday the 13th in March. One month later, today, it is Easter. It came upon us suddenly and almost without warning. In an instant our lives were changed. In an instant we were confined to home. In an instant the economy was shut down, the churches closed. In an instant we knew there was something out there stalking us that could claim our lives, or worse, claim those we know and love. May I say to you this Easter, it is my hope in the power of the resurrection and my prayer to a loving God, that this virus will disappear as quickly as it has come. In an instant, by the healing and life-giving power of God escaped from the tomb of death that first Easter, Jesus will come and heal and pour out His life and save our land. It is noteworthy, isn’t it, that the virus has peaked on Holy Week, some even are saying on Easter itself, but now may it depart in Jesus’ name and in the power of His resurrection today! In an instant today Christ comes to bring us life, new life, abundant life and eternal life in His name! Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is risen today! And so are we!

The scripture for this Easter is perfect for this Holy Week noteworthy for the Coronavirus. For it lays out before us the stark contrast between death and the life offered in a Living, Resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. Our scripture from John 10:10 is instructive –Jesus says: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10) Easter is the absolute proof and testimony that this is precisely why Jesus has come –to bring us life, and not just any life, but abundant life. He has come to bring life, new life, abundant life and eternal life. But please read the context a little more carefully. It begins by Jesus saying, “I am the door.” (v. 10) He alone is the entry point and portal to God. He promises if you enter by Him, you will be saved. Have you sought to enter into the presence of God through Christ alone, who only is the doorway into the Kingdom of God? Jesus goes on to say, “I am the good shepherd.” (v. 11) I willingly lay down my life for my sheep. I lay down my life by my own volition; no one takes it from me. My sheep hear my voice and they follow me. And when they follow me as LORD and as GOOD SHEPHERD I lead them in paths of righteousness, beside green pastures and still waters, even through the valley of the shadow of death when it seems that pestilence is on every side, I leadeth them. If you follow me, promises Jesus I will get you safely to the
Kingdom, to the place where goodness and mercy shall follow you all the days of your life. I am the door, enter in and have salvation. He is our Savior. I am the Good Shepherd, says Jesus, follow Him every day, worship Him every Sunday, live your life for Him, and have life. He is our Lord. We have life, new life, abundant life and eternal life when Jesus Christ is our personal Lord and Savior. Is HE Jesus your Lord and Savior today?????

But there is more in the context of this passage from John 10: 10. Because the first half of the phrase which concludes that Jesus came that we might have life, the first half states this –“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy...” (v. 10) The “thief” is the evil one, another name for the incarnate evil that stalks this earth. It is sometimes referred to as “destroyer” in the Greek, or “The Lord of the Flies”, or the “accuser”, or a “liar and the father of lies”. I will not honor this evil one by uttering its name from this pulpit. But you always know it by its fruits. The fruit of the evil one is that he comes to steal, kill and destroy. You know it by its fruits. Normally, it works in secret and in the darkness. But sometimes it reveals its hand. And it is obvious what is at work. The evil one has come to steal our security and peace and certainty. It has come to destroy our economy and take away our jobs. It has come to divide us as a nation and take away our freedoms. It is seeking to kill us through this deadly virus. It has isolated us from friends and loved ones as we shelter at home. It has brought out the worst in people; just look at the toilet paper aisle. Think about it –it has even closed the churches of this land on Easter Sunday. Tell me it isn’t evil from the very pit of the darkest hell. I don’t ever want to hear someone saying, “Why is God doing this to us? Why is the Lord infecting the land with CoronaVirus?” Not true. Not true at all. It is the “THIEF” who has come to steal, kill and destroy. God is the author of life, not death. That same “thief”, that same evil one, sought to kill Jesus on Good Friday and silence Him on a cross once and forever. But the Almighty God always has the last WORD. And the WORD He spoke on Easter was LIFE, not death. The Word He spoke IS Jesus. And Jesus has come “that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10: 10) The thief brings death; Jesus brings life. HE IS RISEN INDEED!

So is this about death? Or is this about life? Will you enter through the door of Christ Jesus to receive abundant life today? Will you follow the Good Shepherd who will lead you through this time and to a place of new life in HIM? Will you trust that He has come to bring you and all those you love LIFE today? Easter this year is this linchpin of a moment. Between death and life. Between heaven and hell. Between the kingdoms of the powers and principalities of evil and the Kingdom of God. The virus is at its height, but the Lord of Life has come on Easter through the power of His resurrection and that is higher and mightier and greater. On that first Good Friday the powers of hell had done their worst; they had mocked and stripped and beaten and humiliated and nailed to a cross and killed the Lord of Life. They thought they had
won. They thought death had won. They thought evil had the last word. The thief had come to steal, kill and destroy the Lord Jesus Christ. But they couldn’t. They couldn’t stop Him and the new life He had sought to bring. And on Easter life conquered death, once and for all. Because God always has the last Word and that Word is Jesus.

Evil one and your legions, you are cast out by the power of the resurrection Today on Easter! Thief, who has come to steal, kill and destroy, you have yourself been destroyed by an Open Tomb and an ever-living Lord Jesus Christ! Begone, CoronaVirus! Begone, disease! Begone, fear and uncertainty! Begone, death itself. For today Christ has come to remind us once again that He has rolled away the stone, He has become victor over the grave, He has come that we may have life and life abundant. Begone, CoronaVirus, as quickly as you came in the powerful name of Jesus!

Today I can’t go out and have Easter brunch with friends. I can’t go over to my cousin’s home and have Easter dinner. The ham and potatoes must wait. There will again be a time when a full church will sing praises to Jesus, “Jesus Christ is Risen Today!” And by the power of resurrection at work around us, that day will be sooner rather than later, so I believe. So what are my plans today?

I’m going to deliver some Easter lilies to people in my congregation, with social distancing and a mask on, of course, along with others seeking to spread the hope of Easter on Easter Sunday. And then I’m going to go over to Brush Run Cemetery, up behind my home church where I first worshipped the Lord on Easter and where I came to understand Him as the door to new life. And I’m going to bring two Easter lilies with me and place them on the graves of my dear parents, both who are with Jesus in heaven. And I’m going to sing my lungs out in that empty graveyard, “Jesus Christ is risen today! Our triumphant Holy Day. Who did once upon a cross. Suffer to redeem our loss. Alleluia!!!” Because nothing and no power from hell is going to shut me up on Easter Sunday. You can’t take that away from me. And then I will proclaim to all those people assembled there, the church I remember in my youth, “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?” (I Corinthians 15: 54-57) O Coronavirus, you’ve had your day, now begone in the name of Jesus! For Jesus has come to bring us life and life abundant. Thanks be unto God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Alleluia and Alleluia! Amen and Amen!

By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania

IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!