

How Great Is Our God

Chris Tomlin, Ed Cash & Jesse Reeves

Old Orchard Church
October 4, 2009 — 10:15 to 11:45 a.m.

See Print Copy for Words.

**For Christ was crucified
in weakness,
but he lives
by the power of God.**

— 2 Corinthians 13:4 —

Celebrating Jesus: Conqueror of Death

Enter then, all of you, into the joy of our Lord.
First and last, receive alike your reward.
Rich and poor, dance together.
You who have fasted and you who have not fasted, rejoice today.
The table is fully laden: let all enjoy it.
The calf is fatted: let none go away hungry.
Let none lament his poverty;
for the universal Kingdom is revealed.
Let none bewail his transgressions;
for the light of forgiveness has risen from the tomb.
Let none fear death; for the death of the Saviour has set us free.
He has destroyed death, he has despoiled hell.
Hell was filled with bitterness when it met thee:
filled with bitterness, for it was brought to nothing;
filled with bitterness, for it was mocked;
filled with bitterness, for it was overthrown;
filled with bitterness, for it was put in chains.
O death, where is thy sting? O hell where is thy victory?
Christ is risen, and thou art cast down.
Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen.
Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice.
Christ is risen, and life reigns in freedom.
Christ is risen, and there is none left dead in the tomb.
For Christ, being raised from the dead,
has become the first-fruits of those that slept.
To him be glory and dominion to the ages of ages. Amen.
—John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)



Scripture Readings

Old Testament Lesson: Hosea 13:4-6, 9-14

Gospel Reading: Luke 24:1-7

Sermon Series on Matthew

“What To Expect in the Last Chapter of the World’s Story”

Matthew 24:1-14

Ron Lutjens, senior pastor, preaching

Death and Hope

Almost 800 dead as of Thursday after an earthquake in Indonesia; gang-related deaths frequently reported in St. Louis, in Chicago; senior citizens, regularly cruising the obituary page of their newspaper looking for notices about their old friends and neighbors. Death is everywhere, all the time, and each death is the snuffing out of a precious human life, as important as your own. In Jesus Christ, we who are Christians have the only answer that exists for the awfulness of decrepitness, decay and death. But are we able to present that hope, to live that hope, with credibility before our culture?

A few years ago I sat through the Christian funeral of a high school student killed in a car accident. “We’re here to worship God and to celebrate this girl’s life.” That’s how the pastor began the service, and it was classic “up, up, and away” theology. Christ is risen, so everything’s SHVV—Smiley Happy Victory Vibes. Don’t bring the pain, the confusion, the sadness and anger out in the open and give it a voice. Don’t say we’re here to celebrate this girl’s life and to grieve her sudden and untimely and excruciatingly sad -death. Don’t say that life is hard and maddening; don’t say, along with the apostle Paul, that even on this side of the resurrection **“the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance.”** Don’t say that although Christ is safely on the Other Side we are called to live out his victory over evil and death precisely by suffering “with him,” by walking in his footsteps and bearing in our own bodies and hearts the anguish and hardships and God-forsakenness that he himself endured.

Say rather, God is in heaven and love conquers all. But don’t read any psalms of lament lest we incite people to cry or even wail their sorrow. Don’t ask on behalf of the grieving family—and thereby sanctify the question—**“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken us?”** Talk about hope and uplift and don’t say anything too “upsetting”—though people’s hearts are already shattered in a hundred pieces and are longing for the preaching of the church to put words to their quivering, unutterable pain.

Christ’s resurrection did call out of the world a community of believers to live in the victory of his defeat of Death! But that very victory entails the ability to resist the temptation to pull heaven down now into the present; it teaches us to reject a triumphalist, “up, up, and away” theology that perverts and sanitizes the gospel by minimizing the awfulness of a broken world, the problem to which Jesus’ resurrection is the answer.

Being a resurrection community gives us courage and patience to suffer with Christ through all the ravages of evil and sin that have ruined God’s world, whether it be persecution, sickness or injury, doctrinal strife, loss, misery, or even death. We’re called even to count it a privilege. But we may not sweep pain and sadness under the rug. The early Christians knew this; that’s why, according to Acts 8, when the first post-resurrection martyr, Stephen, was brutally killed for his faith, some of his Christian friends, probably at the burial, **“made loud lamentation over him.”**

Believers can scorn Death, it’s true; but only if they are willing to know and feel the pain of its ugliness.

—Ron Lutjens