

For us, every Sunday is Easter—a fresh celebration, in the weekly rhythm of living, that God himself has rescued us from what the ancients feared and we moderns manipulate: the ruination of death. That’s the message we must proclaim to those around us, with courtesy and graciousness always, but with a holy firmness, too, because some will hear Christ speaking through us and pass already from death into life.

—Ron Lutjens

In the Tomb So Cold

By Graham Kendrick

See words in print copy.



Credits

Cover art: The apostle Peter raising Dorcas from the dead after Pentecost. From *Bible Pictures*. Charles Foster Pub. (1897).

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Old Orchard Church

September 5, 2010 — 10:15-11:45 a.m.

**I will
praise you,
O
Lord
my God,
with
all
my
heart;**

**I will
glorify
your
name
forever.**

**For great is your love toward me;
you have delivered me
from the depths of the grave.**

—Psalm 86:12-13—

Celebrating Jesus Christ in His Defeat of Death For Our Sake

It is Sunday—it is Resurrection Day!
Our Lord Christ in his dying and rising
has delivered all who love him
from the deep-seated terrors of Death.
Death can be faced for what it is—our Enemy,
Not the last phase in the benign cycle of life.

Lift high the cross in your life,
the very instrument of death.
For God took it up and by it won our life
And a rich immortality in his Presence.
Worship the Lord together with much gladness;
The day of resurrection has become the Lord's Day!



Today's Scripture

Old Testament Lesson: from Psalm 90

Gospel Reading: Mark 12:18-27

Sermon

“Cooperating Faithfulness:
Trinitarian Triumph Over the Brokenness of the World”

Romans 8:26-39

Ron Lutjens, senior pastor, preaching

We celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly—and in a circle, at the end of worship. A word of direction is given, and with this everyone stands and moves to the walls. The cup is passed in two forms: in a chalice and then in small individual cups. You are free to choose.

And as this is the Supper of the Lord Christ, please listen to the instructions we give as to what qualifies a visitor to participate. **But whether you intend to take communion or not, please join us in the circle.**

Monday Morning and the Empty Tomb

What do most people around us believe about human death? Probably that unless you're an axe murderer you'll live forever in a beautiful place after you die. And this doctrine that we are all immortal and will live happily ever after has threaded its way from ancient times into the present in most cultures. The pagan Celts believed in the immortality of the soul. But the ancients feared death because they feared the gods. Modern people, either believing there is no God, or if he exists, that he must be like a Great Big Sweet Grandpa, try to talk themselves out of the fear of death. Consider the opening lines of a contemporary piece I came across a few years ago:

Death is nothing at all. It does not count. I have only slipped away into the next room. Nothing has happened. Everything remains exactly as it was. I am I, and you are you, and the old life that we lived so fondly together is untouched, unchanged.

Unchanged? Nothing has happened? Tell that to the families of the 2,057 coalition forces killed in Afghanistan during this 9-year old war still raging. Tell the relatives of the thousands of Iraqi civilians blown up in the last seven years of war there that “everything remains exactly as it was.”

What we celebrate in our liturgy today is not that death has been domesticated by redefining it but that it has been conquered by Jesus Christ handing himself over to it. The great insight of the contemporary world, in my judgment, is its realism. We don't just keep a stiff upper lip and stuff our feelings when someone we love dies. We talk about it, we get out feelings out, we form grief support groups. And all of this is far better for us and our children than the stoic determination of an earlier generation not to appear weak or vulnerable in the face of losing someone. Therapeutically, that's a gain. Ask any person old enough to have lived through the two vastly different approaches. But philosophically, we've regressed. We've romanticized death, trying to tame it by regarding it simply as a part of life. We try to withdraw death's sting by convincing ourselves that it's not as bad as the ancients made it out to be. And we not only manipulate death at the end of life, we do it also at the beginning: when an unborn developing baby is killed *in utero* we do not honestly call it that; we call it the termination of a pregnancy.

But death will not be tamed; it must be destroyed. And it is as bad as the ancients feared: it robs us of our life and loves, ends every opportunity to better ourselves, and ushers us into the severity of a divine judgment on our lives. That's what death is and what it does.

But Christ, the incarnate God, broke the back of death when he offered his pure and perfect life to the fury of the justice of God on our behalf. That destroyed him. But it was impossible for death to hold him down. On the third day he was raised to an indestructible, immortal life, and now shares that life with anyone who trusts him.

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