

Easter Sunday
April 20, 2025
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church

1 Corinthians 15:51-57 (EHV)

Look, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴But once this perishable body has put on imperishability, and this mortal body has put on immortality, then what is written will be fulfilled:

Death is swallowed up in victory.

⁵⁵Death, where is your sting?

Grave, where is your victory?

⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

Dear Friends in Christ,

Spring is here. My allergies have announced that the trees are blossoming. The flowers are blooming. Dandelions fill the yards. Tulips and other more appreciated flowers are beautifying our neighborhoods. All these flowers also attract the pollinators – the butterflies eventually, but soon and maybe even now, the bees, hornets and wasps will be active. I like to stand by the pollinator garden in the parsonage yard when it is in full bloom. Every flower is covered with bees and wasps of all sizes and colors. I watch them go from flower to flower to flower in unending motion. Sometimes I'll take pictures. But there is something I don't do. I don't walk through the flowers and scare the bees and wasps. Bees and wasps have sharp little stingers attached to their bodies. Anyone who has been stung by one of these creatures will tell you that it is not a pleasant experience. The stinger pierces your skin which hurts enough, but then they pump venom into you. Not only does this sting a lot, but it can also be very dangerous for anyone allergic to it.

So, I don't interrupt the bees while they are busy at their work. But I wouldn't be afraid to touch a butterfly. You wouldn't react in the same way to a butterfly landing on your hand as you would if a wasp did so. We would think of it as a cute picture to have a butterfly land on a child's nose, but we would quickly shoo away a bee landing on the same nose. Butterflies do not cause fear or anxiety or worry. No stinger on a butterfly.

The resurrection of Christ has changed death from a wasp to a butterfly. Christ's resurrection has taken the sting out of death. Death cannot hurt us. Death cannot win. We have the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul explains where death got its sting:

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

There was no death before sin. Adam and Eve lived in a perfect garden with imperishable, immortal bodies. They had no fear of sickness, injury, disease or death because these did not exist yet. They didn't even have to fear stinging insects because all of God's creatures lived in perfect peace. The one law of God was perfect and good too. But when our first parents rebelled against God's one, perfect law, sin was in the world. Now, the law of God condemned them to death. They died spiritually that day, separating themselves from their Creator by sinning against him. Their imperishable, immortal bodies began to die that day as well. Sin brought death into the world.

Everyone who is honest with himself or herself knows that our bodies are perishable. We know that we are mortal, that is, our bodies are subject to death. The Scriptures tell us that sin is the cause of our

mortality. Sin is the sting that injected poison that leads to death. We can therefore also know that we have a sinful nature when we recognize that our bodies are perishable.

Did anyone here wake up this morning with some aches and pains? If so, your body is perishable, and you have a sinful nature. Do you have to make sounds to get out of bed or stand up from a chair? This also is a clear sign that you have sinned. Have you scraped your knee, bumped your head, or broken a bone? If so, you have been stung by sin. Whenever your body is sick or weak you know that sin has stung you and that your body is mortal.

This body we now have is not prepared to live forever with Christ. This body must be changed before we enter eternal life. Christ did this on Good Friday by taking the sting of sin and death for us. Jesus is the only human whose body was not subject to death because of sin for Christ had no sin. In love, he took our sin upon himself. He became sin for us. He was treated as your sins deserved and the perfect Son of God died upon the cross to take the sting out of sin for you. He truly died and was put into the grave for us sinners.

Paul makes the point in 1 Corinthians 15 is that if Jesus had stayed in the grave, we would all be lost. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. Jesus did not stay in the grave. Death did not defeat our Savior. He lives and will nevermore die. The resurrection of Christ guarantees that his sacrifice on Friday truly paid for every sin. We are forgiven. His resurrection means that death itself has been overcome and that we will also rise from death one day. Paul tells us what will happen to prepare us for eternity.

Look, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

This is what must happen and what will happen on the day Jesus returns. For when Christ rose from the dead, he was no longer subject to death. He had conquered death. His body was no longer able to suffer. So it will be for all who trust in Christ Jesus. We will all be changed in a moment. With our current perishable bodies, we have to wait for injuries to heal and sicknesses to run their course. Not so on the last day. In a moment, in the blink of an eye, we will be given imperishable and immortal bodies. If Christ was still in the grave, this would all be a fairy tale. But Christ is risen from the dead. It is all true!

Paul takes a line from the Old Testament lesson from Isaiah to describe the complete victory we have been given over death: *Death is swallowed up in victory.*

Since we still live in perishable and mortal bodies it is difficult for us to view death as completely swallowed up in victory. Funerals don't always seem like victories. Sometimes they are now called celebrations of life to focus on the relationships and good events that happened in a person's life. But the funeral of a believer is a victory. It should be a celebration of life – the life of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the life everlasting that Christ gives. In a Christian funeral, victory over death is proclaimed and believed because Christ's resurrection swallowed up death forever. Believers are promised a banquet of the best food and drink on the mountain of the Lord. This is victory, not death. Believers are given an invitation to the wedding supper of the Lamb to rejoice with our victorious Lord Jesus forever. Christ has indeed been raised from the dead and given us complete victory over sin and death.

We have such a certain victory that Paul is able to mock death and the grave with words from Hosea's prophecy:

⁵⁵Death, where is your sting? Grave, where is your victory?

It takes some confidence to mock a strong enemy. At the beginning of the season of Lent, we heard the account of David and Goliath. David was confident in the Lord's ability to win the battle so much so

that he boasted before a much larger, stronger, more well equipped with weapons enemy, “Today the Lord will hand you over to me.” (1 Samuel 17). And David ran to the battle lines and the Lord won the victory.

The prophet Elijah challenged the prophets of the false god Baal to a contest to see which god would send fire upon an altar. Elijah mocked the prophets of the false god who had been asking their god to send fire for hours: “Shout louder! He is a god, isn't he? He may be deep in thought or busy or on a journey. Perhaps he is asleep and will wake up!”

Why could David and Elijah challenge stronger and more numerous enemies with such strong and even mocking words? David was convinced that the Lord was stronger than any enemy. He had faith in the Lord. Elijah was convinced that Baal was nothing because there is no God but one, and the Lord is his name. By faith, Elijah had no fear of the false god or the false prophets.

By faith, we can mock death and the grave. The grave, even with a large stone to cover it, could not hold the dead body of Christ. He rose from the grave. If he has done this, and he has, then he can raise our bodies from any grave. And death cannot win. If we live to the day when Jesus returns, we will be changed and given imperishable, immortal bodies. If death intervenes, we will be raised to life and given imperishable, immortal bodies. Because Christ is risen, death has no effect on our future. We will be with Christ. We have victory over sin, victory over death and victory over the grave. Death has lost its sting. The scary wasp has become a harmless butterfly thought the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

Amen.