RELINQUISHING DEATH
Acts 10:34-43

Well – we’re here. Our final series on “relinquishing” things unto God. And while all the sermons focused on that which keeps us from God…today, on Easter, we look at relinquishing that which was already taken away – and yet we still hold firmly onto. I think of all of the things we have focused on THIS BY FAR is the easiest for us to relinquish…because it’s already done – AND YET – AND YET…it’s quite possibly the hardest as well.

Let’s first begin by reading our text today.

READ TEXT: Acts 10: 34-43

Luke is quite clear on what Peter was proclaiming. There was 1 message: and that message was the “good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.” Not just Lord of the Jews…but of the Gentiles as well. And Peter uses this moment to simply lay down the facts:
- You know Christ was in the area – throughout the area of Judea.
- You know he healed people and went around the area doing all kinds of good and announced peace through himself
- You know he was killed upon a cross.

But here’s something you may or may not know…but is equally true: God raised him from the dead 3 days later…and he was seen.

And if we go back a little bit to the beginning of Acts 10 we read that Cornelius was a God-fearing man. A devout man who constantly prayed, gave, and helped the poor. But what Cornelius didn’t know was Christ. What he didn’t know was that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth to heal, to bring peace…to die upon a wooden cross as a common criminal WITH COMMON CRIMINALS. And that God raised him. Jesus Christ, the one that was nailed to the cross and died upon it…has conquered death and was raised to life. And because of that he then stands as the judge of both the living and the dead. And those that believe that he is the ultimate judge…they receive forgiveness.

But it’s much more than this. Because forgiveness only comes by way of the cross. It’s only forgiveness because of the willingness of Christ to be placed upon it. It’s only forgiveness because Christ WAS raised to life. And this is the central message that we
hold to as well. That Jesus Christ died upon the cross and that because of what he has done he has granted us life.

I think so often in our conversations we quote Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:52 “O Death, where is your sting?”…and I’ve used it in funeral services– and IT IS what we proclaim…but how does that feel when you hear it? How is that connection between our head…and our heart? Because I’m pretty sure death DOES sting. It hurts the one dying, it hurts the ones that are experiencing the death of someone. It hurts when we remember those that have died.

O Death…where is your sting? Right here …in our chest. That’s where it is.

But why? Why does it sting? I think it’s because we have a fear of it…we worry of it…we run away from it…and even our desire to prolong life and push death away…and by anything and everything that we do to simply not talk about it. But we all face death – don’t we? As Christians we all proclaim that death simply is what must be in order for our sinful nature to be washed away. We boldly proclaim that “If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.” (Rom 14:8) and we find comfort in those words from Paul…and yet that “dying” part…we don’t want to talk about it.

It’s just too tough.
It’s too sad.

I read an article from a man who faced death as he battled leukemia. And as he writes he mention that he “faced the sobering reality that his life truly was a vapor” (James 4:14). But, like Paul, he came to understand that “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). And that is great to hear…but must we, ourselves, face leukemia or something else to truly begin understand that which we so boldly proclaim and cling to? That life is short and that’s OK for we live with Christ and in our death…we actually live?

Maybe we need to talk about what is living…and what is dying. Because to understand one also means you begin to understand the other.

To the secular world death would be the opposite of living. So death would be…nothing. No breathing, no heartbeat…no sense of life. But then that begs the question – what is “life” – or what is “living”? Because I guarantee you there are a lot of people out there
that are not “dead” because they are breathing…but they definitely are not living either. Society, I would argue, would say that living is experiences. New mountains to climb, new oceans to swim in and new experiences to experience. Some would even argue that living is a feeling. So when you climb those mountains, when you swim those depths, when you experience those experiences “living” becomes the feelings that come upon you IN THOSE MOMENTS. So living…is the feeling in that moment. This then would mean that death…is none of those. It’s the anti-living.

Either way…I think nobody wants to talk about death – we’d rather talk about living. Death is scary and has now become a taboo topic. And what’s even sadder? We…as a Christian community…are now walking that same path. That death…now…has a sting.

But why? And I ask because I too struggle with it. We proclaim that death doesn’t have the last say, we proclaim like we read here in Acts that Christ and the healing power of the Holy Spirit hurls us over death’s door and into real life, real living, where time and space and death are no more – where eternity IS…and yet…and yet…the grip of death still holds tightly. It’s as if we are walking along a path and there before us stands the cross – signifying death…and we smack right into it and try to shake it off but can’t. We’re stuck. We can’t go around it, we can’t go over it, we can’t dig under it…so we simply stop and stare. And when we do that…when we stare at the cross and don’t look beyond it we then fail to see the empty tomb. We fail to live into the resurrected Lord. Standing and staring at death instead of talking about it and understanding it fails to see the work Christ did beyond the cross.

But in order to get there…in order to get to the tomb…in order to live into real living…we have to face death. And by God’s grace when we stand in the face of death, when we stand and stare at the foot of the cross…we come to realize that the only way over it – the only way around it – the only way TO GET TO THE EMPTY TOMB…was actually by Christ. By living into his dying.

**John 11:25-26** says, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though they die, yet shall they live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall NEVER die.”

**John 3:16** - “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have ETERNAL LIFE.”
We simply MUST DIE, we must face death in order to live. Not only must we face it…but we must relinquish it as well. We must let it go – let go of that which we fear most.

We…simply put…need to face and accept death. We have to accept it because it’s inevitable. But more importantly, we have to accept it not for what it is…but because of what it COULD HAVE BEEN and yet is not. We have to relinquish the fear that death has. Because when we release the grip of death…we allow the grace of God. We LIVE into Christ.

Here’s something we all know but maybe not tell ourselves…
And I’m going to be blunt: YOU ARE DYING – I AM DYING.
And we are told to live here, today, as people who live in paradise tomorrow. But for whatever reason – our motto has become “live today because you just my die tomorrow”.
And that’s completely wrong! Because that understanding is that once we die ….that’s it!
That there is nothing more. We’ve become people who proclaim eternity in peace and love…and yet cannot let go of the now and actually now fear tomorrow.

You ever hear the term “dead-man walking”? It’s a term used for those who have been sentenced to death for crimes. But really…is that not all of us? That sin has given us a death sentence – every one of us? The truth…as I see it though…is that actually we live here as set-free dead men and women walkers. Death awaits every single one of us. We put that motion into place a long time ago when we desired to do things our way instead of God’s (Genesis 3:19). But just as death creeps closer each and every day…guess what else comes towards us…life. And that’s the order we must recognize…death THEN life.
Not life then death. Death isn’t the last thing we experience…life is. But in order to breath in life, in order to be set free from death we actually have to let go of death. We actually have to allow Christ’s death and resurrection to do just what it did and lose the chains that bind us. Remove the grip of death that was sinking us low. Uncover the dirt that has been tossed on top of our bodies, step out of the flames that consume us, release the sting of death and dive head-first into the embrace of our Risen Savior..

We are set-free dead-walkers. And it’s about time we remembered that. That’s exactly what Easter is. It’s the living into Christ’s raising. It’s the proclamation that He is Risen and the response that “He is risen indeed”. It’s declaring that God raised Christ from the dead on the third day and that it’s not some tall-tale but He was truly seen, and interacted with people…and that he did it for you and he did it for me……but you, and me,…we
actually need to start living into what that means. We can’t go through each day as fearers of death. We can’t cower from that which we proclaim we should be good with – OK with…because to go through death means to enter life.

Relinquish your fear of death. Set free the chains that are loose and yet you still allow to be coiled up around you. Death has no sting…because that which stings you…is no more. The pain of lost loved ones…that does stings. And I think that’s a different question and work-through. Because we see Christ’s response to death and his tears when he weeps for those he lost AND WILL LOSE – that obviously “stings” him. But those tears are what leads Christ to do what he does. His love is what sends him to the cross. And his power is what raises him 3 days later. God’s pain as he saw his son dying is what he had to see and experience in order for what we see and experience to be completely forgiven.

**Rom 8:38-39** - “For I am SURE (hear that again…)…I AM SURE that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” THAT is the sting we faced that was taken away. Because the work of Christ didn’t stop at the cross. The work of Christ didn’t end when the tomb was sealed up. The death of Christ was just the beginning – for 3 days later he was raised from the dead. 3 days later he overcame that which had the final say up until then. 3 days later he leaped over death and danced upon the grave and the tomb.

3 days later…he did it all for you.

Let’s pray