

We are Victorious  
Sermon for Easter Monday  
Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

*I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. <sup>51</sup>Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup>in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. <sup>53</sup>For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup>When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." <sup>55</sup> "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" <sup>56</sup>The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup>But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>58</sup>Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

Victory by shooting 11 meters – Germany wins the 120-minute thriller against Brazil and becomes world champion in soccer in 2014. What a frenzy it caused! Cars honking all over Germany, singing, dancing, and partying until the early hours of the morning. One person even took the liberty of putting up a large canvas in a cemetery that said: "You don't know what you've missed!" Yes, everyone took part in this celebration. The German team's victory was not just a victory for 11 athletes, but every German felt like a winner that day. We know that the way things went after that match in the 2014 World Cup couldn't go on forever. After a high came another low. That's just the way it is with soccer. Sometimes you're at the top, sometimes you're at the bottom. When Germany was on the top, everyone said: we're winners! Even the dead were allowed to join in the celebrations! When Germany wasn't doing well, it was the team's fault. Nobody wanted to share in the defeat. You want to forget the result as quickly as possible and have nothing to do with it. Easter is like a great victory! The victory of our Lord over sin, death and the devil. And we can all share in Jesus' victory. We should go out into the streets and alleys and honk our car horns, spreading the word with all kinds of media. And what would we say? The resurrection really is for the dead and the living! The resurrection also applies to us when we are at rock bottom! The resurrection changes our whole life! Back when Germany won against Brazil, we said: "We won." That's a psychological thing, of course. Everyone knows that it wasn't *me* personally who played soccer against the Brazilians and won. But in Jesus' victory over death, it really is different. The resurrected body of our Lord is directly connected to our body, which will be resurrected. Paul even says this: Whoever does not also believe in his own resurrection, his faith in Christ is futile, and we are the poorest of all people. When Jesus prays for the church in His high priestly prayer shortly before His crucifixion, He first prays for the disciples, but then also for all those who would believe through them. This means us. And Jesus says to them that we can all be one. We will be one **with Him**. With His whole being, Jesus is turned towards **us**. On His cross and empty tomb are the words: "For us." At our baptism, the word is once again very personal: For you! Then every time we come here for communion: For you! Jesus is not a soccer player that we can only admire on television or, if we are very lucky, see from afar on the soccer field. No, He has turned His face to us personally. And His eyes are not the kind that scrutinize us from top to bottom to see if we are even up to snuff. His team is not just made up of superstars or super Christians... but includes everyone. *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* Just like Him, we all will not rot in the grave, but will experience the resurrection in our own lives. But what if it doesn't look like victory at all? What if we are at the bottom?

In soccer, we see highs and lows, like a Ferris wheel. Our lives are certainly like that sometimes. Sometimes we are at the top. We are doing well, we are healthy, we have good friends, and everything is perfect in the family. After that, we can assume that there will be one or two crises that bring us down again. At some point in our lives there will be a crisis anyway. The older we get, the weaker we become. That's just the way life is. The problem with such things is that you can never really be happy. When I'm down, I have no strength to hope for better things. When I'm at the top, I know that the fall into the depths is sure to come. God never wanted it to be like this in our lives. And in Jesus' resurrection, He has finally thwarted this wheel's loop. In Jesus' resurrection, there is a total turnaround that has reversed everything. The apostle Paul had to explain this. He had to explain it because we

cannot see it and therefore cannot understand it immediately. The church to whom Paul was writing at the time, the Corinthians, were able to live well when the church was outwardly doing well. The beginning time as Christians was a wonderful time. We can read about this in the Acts of the Apostles. God tells the apostle Paul that he had a large family in Corinth. And it was true. The Corinthians were a very successful, growing church. They also had more spiritual gifts than anyone else. They could cope well with the times at the top of the wheel. But then some setbacks came. Even the brightest lights among them died. And with their eyes, they could only see death. These people were laid to rest, and they did not rise again. At least not immediately. The question was quite human. How can a dead person who already stinks in his grave ever come back to life? But that wasn't the only problem they had. They were generally unable to deal with weakness. What kind of body will we have in heaven? The body of an ailing old man or woman or that of a young man or woman? In general, what will life together be like in heaven? The Corinthians lived exactly according to the pattern of the Ferris wheel. They only looked at what was happening here and now in life. Being on top was easy. Everyone wants to share in the victory.

But if there was failure, their faith also came to an end. They could no longer imagine victory in Jesus. It is simply human. It is also human for us to understand the resurrection according to regional standards. Paul must disagree. The mortal body and earthly existence are fundamentally different from the hope that awaits us. In his speech, the apostle Paul fights for life. He explains that through Jesus' resurrection a change of nature has taken place. Death and the devil are now only temporary. "O death, where is your sting? Where is your victory?" he exclaims. Normally, when we speak of a sting, we think of a bee sting. The word meant here is the tip of a spear – Paul means a weapon of war here. We know that the tip of the spear actually has the power to kill and injure. Without this tip, a spear is merely a broomstick that can only seemingly injure. Christ, according to this image, has taken the point away from the spear. Now all that remains at death is a broomstick. That is why we can't keep thinking in the old categories of Becoming and Dying. All this is from ancient times. We will be different, Paul tells us...but we will not be **who** we are. What is sown corruptible, is raised incorruptible, the apostle tells us. This means that we will indeed be different in our whole life, but it will be exactly us... Not like the soccer team, where it is actually others who win and we can only rejoice. No, it is those people who are alive today and who experience the grace of our Lord Jesus today who will be resurrected, not others. Paul speaks this message to the people here. To the people who are dealing with illness and death here and now. People who are actually at the bottom end of the Ferris wheel. This word also applies to them. Jesus' victory, Jesus' resurrection, shall also be *your* victory. Christ has finally turned the eternally recurring and turning wheel of happiness, misfortune, death, and life on its head. He has shown that in the end there is only life. The problem that the apostle Paul had with the Corinthians is a problem that we also know. It is that we cannot see clearly and it is that not everyone knows it. Death, even if it has lost its sting, still rages in and around us. People get sick, people die. Yes, and just as the Corinthians also had to deal with unbelief and little faith, so do we. It is not only the problem of death in and among us, but in general it is the case that people can no longer believe in the presence of God among us and in our church. Satan may have lost his power and the sting of death, but he has not yet lost his voice. He is trying with all his might to convince Christians in particular that the resurrection cannot be true and is not true. But anyone who does not believe in the resurrection has lost the meaning of the whole thing. Those who can no longer preach about the resurrection can only talk about this life. Then we as a church are no better than any other organization. We could just as well hold a political rally or other event for the betterment of human life. After all, our core task is to talk about the hope of resurrection through Jesus Christ. We should stand against the loud voice of Satan. Telling others. If it applies to everyone, everyone should know it. The message should be proclaimed. We should have protests against death and Satan. We should also rebel against the hopelessness that is spreading throughout the world and bring hope in return. Under no circumstances should we allow hopelessness to spread among us instead. We should and may insist on our right to life. We may say that Christ has acquired this right for us and that it is therefore valid and cannot simply be made null and void by a false rumor. Wherever people complain and wherever people are sad, we should and may make it clear to them that Satan, death, and all the suffering in the world is like a broomstick, which can scare us because it sometimes looks like a dangerous weapon of war, but which cannot really do any harm. We should tell people that life has been like an exciting soccer match... But now the victory is certain... Jesus is victorious... we are victorious. Amen.