

New Life! But How?
Sermon for Easter Monday
Sermon Text: Isaiah 25:6-9



On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. ⁷And He will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. ⁸He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of His people He will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. ⁹It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, that He might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for Him; let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

The small congregation stood in a tight circle around a coffin made of wood. The preparations for the corpse had little effect on the scorching African heat. And the smell of the decomposing body spread so that a whole swarm of flies also gathered for the funeral service. Something incomprehensible had happened. The 19-year-old daughter of a parishioner had died tragically in a car accident. A few days ago, she had traveled to the capital city full of high spirits and confidence to begin her studies and a new life. She was the only hope of the whole family as she had graduated with straight A's and had a brilliant future ahead of her... Now, we all stood around her coffin with her family. All the dreams and plans were suddenly shattered. All that remained of this young woman was a wooden coffin and the unforgettable stench. I felt so helpless. What can you do about death? What can you say about death?

There are people who can deal with death quite well. In our world, it is quite clear that no human being can live forever. To tell the truth, it would be a catastrophe for the world if people suddenly invented a drug against death. That's why people simply accept that death is a natural process to which we must resign ourselves. Yet even in such people, there is a desire to reduce death. And there is also great sadness when death comes unexpectedly. People have many ways of dealing with such sadness. A very old method, which can be found among the ancient Greeks, and is still popular today in various forms, is the explanation of the soul. According to this theory, humans have an invisible soul that exists deep within them and remains untouched by the whole process of death. Then the soul would soar up to heaven after death, unharmed. Another example is in the Hindu religion where the soul is compared to a lotus flower. The roots of the lotus flower rest in the muddy ground while the beautiful white flower floats on the water, untouched by the mud. According to Hindu beliefs, people's soul is like this lotus flower and earthly human life is like the roots buried deep in the mud. Those who believe the Hindu religion can comfort themselves with this theory when they must die. There is only one problem... and that is that people aren't lotus flowers! Our souls are affected by the troubles of this world. And there is a second problem with this theory: it completely ignores God. In other words, people seek hope and comfort for their souls from within themselves and not hope and comfort from God. According to this theory, people don't need to be saved by God because the soul remains untouched by sin. In this regard, God is meaningless for people and their eternal joy. Today, there are countless people who hold this exact ancient belief. Throughout the world, even in Germany, you can attend courses or visit gurus who would show people the way to their inner soul. They all make one big mistake. They avoid God. And because they avoid God, they have no right or reason to talk about eternal joy in heaven. We need to see death differently. In the story of Creation, we learn that death is enmity between God and man. Something happened between God and us that separated us from each other. According to the Bible, life and death are not decided by whether my heart is still beating or whether my blood is still circulating, rather life and death are decided by what happens

between me and God. Death is therefore only the outward display of something much greater. The deciding question is whether I live or die... whether I find my purpose in God or not. The Prophet Isaiah was writing many years before the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He doesn't yet know how God would eliminate death. To tell the truth, throughout the Old Testament, eternal life can only be vaguely imagined. But what Isaiah does realize is that God Himself must do something to create eternal life. He knows very well that eternal life can't be recreated at all by human effort or human wisdom. So God speaks of the fact that He will lift the veil between this life and the life to come, and we will then see everything clearly.

When the wall between East and West Germany came down in 1989, I was living in South Africa. You could see pictures of people hauling away pieces of the Berlin Wall. "Nothing good will come of this," I thought at the time. Sooner or later, the might of the government will intervene. But what I didn't know, and what I'm sure most of the people didn't know, was that other walls had long since fallen before this one. It was only a matter of time before the entire wall between East and West would come down. The Prophet Isaiah looks at resurrection and new life from afar. He doesn't yet know about Jesus' resurrection. He can only slightly understand all of this. But one thing he does see is that the authority and power of death are being challenged by God Himself. That's why he sees the wall between life and death crumbling away, even if the power of death is still painfully visible. When it comes to life and death, we don't have to search the soul nor do we have to look for a medical solution to death. Determining this matter is in God's hands. When the problem is in God's hands, then the question isn't whether death can be overcome or not. Since God created all life anyway, it is completely clear that God can abolish death instantly. Rather, the question is whether God wants to get rid of death – that is the crucial question. If we want to know whether God wants this or not, we must look at Jesus. What did Jesus do? He wept when He saw the dead boy outside the gates of the city of Nain and He was also deeply moved emotionally when Lazarus died. Throughout His life, Jesus fought against death and its consequences. Finally, and most conclusively, He carried death itself on His shoulders. Why? Because He wants to take death away from us. And Jesus also gave us proof that death has been overcome by His own resurrection from the dead. That is why I am certain that at some point, we will experience the veil between us and God being lifted. I am sure that we will see Jesus and He will be carrying a huge handkerchief with which He will wipe away all your tears and mine. Amen.