Follow Jesus Sermon Series
"Follow Jesus" -- Psalm 118:17
Easter Sunday Sermon

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dearly Beloved,

The Easter cry of "Christ is Risen!" is sounding and resounding like a wave passing over the world this day as the sun rises upon land after land, country after country, congregation after congregation, Christian after Christian. Jesus, the Incarnate Jehovah Who died on the cross after paying the eternal price for the sins of the whole world, is risen. Though He died, yet He lives, and the Easter cry of "Christ is Risen!" is often followed with the faithful reply that repeats the sounding joy, "He is Risen indeed!"

Easter angels - that is, called messengers, that is, men who are faithful pastors - proclaim the Resurrection of the crucified Jesus and this is one of the foundational doctrines of the one true faith, namely, the truth that "Christ is Risen." The faithful, confessional Christian replies with a declaration of the same; namely, "He is Risen indeed!" So now what? What comes next? What would be the next Easter exclamation for the soul after "Christ is Risen!" and "He is Risen, indeed!"?

There is one and it comes from the Scriptures and it applies to the individual and it is a declaration that you may take home with you today and proclaim throughout the rest of your life, for as many, or for as few, as those days may be here on this earth. It is the 17th verse of Psalm 118. Listen to and inscribe on your soul those words as you ...

... "Follow Jesus" ...

"I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

"I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD."

Now, let's face it. That verse appears to be the words of a man who is not facing reality. The world, the devil and even your old sinful self mocks that verse: "I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD." The world laughs and says, "Oh you foolish man. Do you not know that everyone dies? How stupid. Tell me, who is alive today that was living during the Civil War? None. Zero. Zip. Nada. You may chant your Scripture verse all you want, but YOU WILL DIE." Thus far the world and, as far as the fact that there is a death that takes each from this world, it is true. Until the end of history each person will experience the separation of body and soul.

Satan, the tempter who lied before the Fall of Adam and Eve, and who said, "Take and eat; 'you will not die' (Genesis 3:4)," now stands at the ready in order to accuse you. "You are a sinner. You will die. You deserve hell for you have sinned - for you do sin - for you will sin. Quote the sermon text all you want but you will die now and you will die forever." Thus far the devil, the accuser and the deceiver, and, as far as the fact that each of us is a sinner and will depart this life, it is true. Until the end of life in this world, each

one of us will be a sinner.

Even your old sinful self balks at that first part of the psalm verse, "I shall not die, but I shall live." As we age, experience tells us that we will die. We look at those around us ... family, congregational members, neighborhood friends, even kids at school. People are dying left and right. There is only one reason why, each day, there are more people younger than you today than yesterday ... only one reason why the number of people older than you today is less than yesterday. Death. Each day more younger; each day few older. The reason is death. And, as we live, our souls tell us that we have sinned and the Scriptures tell us that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). This is most certainly true.

So, what does this mean: "I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD."? Does the psalmist deny the truth? Is our sermon text only the declaration of the hyper-optimist with a super smiley-face, or of a man OD'd on fantasy, or simply the ravings of a nut? Actually, none of the above. The psalmist understands doctrine and that there are two deaths. Indeed, the Bible from Genesis through Revelation teaches that there are two deaths. The first death is the separation of body and soul. This death is experienced and suffered by both Christian and non-Christian alike. Abel and Judas, the thief on the cross and King Saul are examples of dying this death - two dying in the Christian faith and two dying without faith in the LORD God. This is the first death, the separation of body and spirit.

The other death is, simply put, hell - everlasting condemnation and eternal separation from the beatific and gracious and benevolent Presence of the LORD God Almighty. This is the eternal abode where those go who are not the children of God. Or, as the Bible reveals in the last book, "This is the second death, the lake of fire; and if any one's name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:14).

Jesus told of these two deaths when He wrote to the Church, encouraging each one therein to remain steadfast in the faith. He states it in His Word written by St. John the Apostle: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will thee the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death" (Revelation 2:10-11). And to one facing the consequences of the first death and who is grieving the loss of a loved one, Jesus declares, "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26).

The psalmist answers "yes!" when he chants, "I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD." The holy writer is one who has been given the gift of faith, and who understands the pure doctrine of the one true faith, and who, as a result, remains steadfast in God's Word and work by declaring, "I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD."

The basis for such a personal confession of the truth is the body of deeds done by the LORD. What are the deeds of God? Many, and they are wonderful and they are terrible. Ponder the LORD's creative deeds. Our God, Whose Name is "I AM," said "Let there be" and there was! Out of nothing. The Word spoke and the universe is. Stars in their patterns and planets that wander the heavens. Attractive gravity and momentous mass and quantum physics. The Word spoke and the earth is. Waves of water and grain. Grapes that cluster awaiting time to be wine. Wheat that matures for the making of bread. A lamb without blemish and the beasts of the land. The Word spoke and man is - male and female are. And God said, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). Because of this, dearly beloved, you exist. You live, move and have your being. Thus you may repeat back to the LORD God Almighty:

For Thou hast formed my inward parts;
Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.
I will praise Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Marvelous are Thy works, And that my soul knows very well.
My frame was not hidden from Thee, When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
(Psalm 139:13-15)

"I shall ... recount the deeds of the LORD." What are the deeds of God? Many, and they are wonderful and they are awe-full. Ponder the LORD's redemptive deeds. The psalmist could recount that Jehovah came down to earth at Bethel and you can hear that He came down to earth at Bethlehem. In other words, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). There is the shed blood of the lamb that caused death to pass-over the houses in the land of bondage and there is the shed Blood of Jesus, "the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Recall the Old Testament scapegoat sent out into the wilderness bearing the sins of the people and remember Jesus sent out into the wilderness where He defeated the old evil foe. Recount the Day of Atonement when the high priest entered into the Holy of Holies and revisit Good Friday when Jesus, the High Priest, took all sins to the cross and entered into the Most Holy Place. Recall the belly of the fish that could not keep the man when the Word spoke and the man was raised from the dead on the third day, and behold that Jesus risen from the tomb of death on the third day, and "behold, something greater than Jonah is here" (Matthew 12:31). Now recall, dear Christian what Jesus said, "Because I live you also shall live" (John 14:19).

No wonder the faithful comforts himself with the truth, "I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD." Are there more deeds? Many more and they are wonderful and gracious. Ponder the LORD's faith giving deeds. As God was present in tent, tabernacle and temple, so He is Emmanuel, God with us, in this holy house and in all here who offer their worship and praise. As God led His people through the baptizing waters of the Red Sea, so He has brought you out of the land of death and into His Presence by Baptism, giving you the gift of faith to believe in Him. As God fed His congregation in the wilderness, so He feeds and feasts His Church with the Bread from above and the best Wine that gladdens the hearts of His own. Also ponder the burning bush. This appearance of God is a proclamation of the Resurrection wherein the LORD is God not of the dead but God of the living (Matthew 22:32), so also, neither Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Jacob, nor a believing father, nor a trusting son, nor any other of God's faithful who have departed this life are dead.

All of these, and more, are the deeds of the LORD - accomplished and done by Him that you may remember them for yourself ... that you may recount them for your family ... that you may tell others of this Good News. All of this is accomplished by the Holy Trinity that those others and you may hear, believe and trust these words: You are forgiven of all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the … Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

"I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD." Amen.