"Days of the Week" -- Sermon Series for Lent & Easter

"Day 8 -- Resurrection"
Luke 24:1

The Resurrection of Our Lord -- April 11, 2004
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls

Texts (NOTE: ILCW Series C)
Psalm 118:1-2, 15-24
Exodus 15:1-11
I Corinthians 15:1-11
Luke 24:1-11

Suggested Hymns (TLH)
Jesus Christ Is Risen Today, Alleluia! (199)
The Strife Is O'er, the Battle Done (210)
He's Risen, He's Risen, Christ Jesus, the Lord (198)

I. On the First Day of the Week, Very Early in the Morning ...

The Word of the Lord from St. Luke, chapter 24: Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared (Lk. 24:1).

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven…one.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday…Monday.

That's how things go, right? Seven days make a week, and then you start over. Don't care for Wednesdays? Another one is coming soon. A week of vacation? Nice, but Monday's on the way. The pattern has been going ever since the beginning-literally. God created the heavens and the earth in six days, and then He rested on the seventh. That's why a week has seven days. Here and there, a government has tried to change it up-go to ten days for greater productivity or some such scheme. It hasn't worked, though. As far as man is concerned, you've got seven days to get a week's work done. The week has a beginning, a middle and an end. A lot like life. You don't get an eighth day.

Now, while the Lord used seven days to create all things and to rest, He sometimes makes a big deal about an eighth day. The firstborn of oxen and sheep were to be sacrificed to Him: The animal was to stay with its mother for seven days, and given to the Lord on the eighth (Ex. 22:29). Likewise, baby boys in Israel were circumcised on the eighth day after birth-it was on Day 8 that they officially became part of the people of God (Lev. 12:2). When a leper thought he was healed of his disease, he was to show himself to the priest; and the priest would declare him clean on the eighth day (Lev. 14:10). When the temple was finished in Israel, the people celebrated for a week, and then the temple of God's presence was dedicated on the eighth day (2 Chr. 7:9).

Note that list and keep it in mind, if you will: The eighth day was for consecration, deliverance, cleansing, healing and restoration. It was as if the Lord were saying, "Life in this world takes place in seven day units. When it comes to eternal life, look for an eighth day."

As the Gospel lesson begins, it's been quite a week. On the first day, Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem. The next day, Day 2, He cleansed the temple and taught the crowds on Days 3 and 4. He gave His disciples a new commandment and a new Supper. Day 6 brought betrayal and arrest, then scourging and death. That was Sunday through Friday, Days 1 through 6. On the seventh day, there was nothing but grief and a stone rolled in front of a tomb. The week had a beginning, a middle and an end. So, apparently, did Jesus.

That's what the women are thinking when they walk to the tomb, very early in the morning. Jesus has breathed His last, and it's time to prepare the body for proper burial. It's Sunday morning. It's the first day of a new week, and the first day of the rest of their hopeless lives-hopeless because their one Hope is in the tomb. That's how it works, this world: Whether it's life or a week, there just isn't an eighth day. The only time you have an eighth day is when the Lord is at work for thing like deliverance, healing, and restoration.

But listen to the angels in the tomb: "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.'" (Lk. 24:5b-7). The news isn't just shocking-it's perplexing. Life doesn't come after death-that just isn't how things work in this world. St. Mark tells us that the news leaves the women silent and afraid for a while, though St. Luke skips that part to tell us that eventually they go and tell the disciples. And what is the response of the disciples-the eleven apostles called by Jesus? They think that the news is nonsense, an idle tale.

Silence, fear and doubt: Those are the responses of the first people who hear of the Resurrection. It's nonsense, they believe-too good to be true. But for once, it's not, because the angels speak the Word of the Lord.

Christ has died, but Christ is risen. After death, there is life-eternal life. Furthermore, He is not the only one to rise again, but the firstfruits of the dead. Therefore, He will raise all of His people up to eternal life, for so He has promised: "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (Jn. 11:25-26).

That's how things work when the women go to tomb very early in the morning, on the first day of the week. But is it just the first day of the week? Remember, when the Lord is going about restoring, healing, and delivering you, He commanded that these things be done on the eighth day. When Jesus rises from the dead, He rises so that you might be healed, delivered and restored into the Lord's presence forever. He rises so that you might have new life. A seven-day week has a beginning, a middle and an end. So does life in this deteriorating world. But Christ defeats that end of death and rises again, so that you might have eternal life without end.

It is generally well-known that Christians traditionally gather for Divine Service on Sunday because it is the day of Jesus' Resurrection. But there is another reason why we worship on the first day of

the week: It is also the eighth day of the week-an announcement that Christ brings us new life.

Now, all of this makes for a nice talk, but we must ask this question: So what? What does this have to do with you and me?

So what? So this: Your Days 6 and 7 are coming. But so is your Day 8.

II. Your Eighth Day

Your Days 6 and 7 are coming. In other words, unless the Lord first returns, you face your Day 6 of death and your Day 7 when you rest in the grave. Experience tells you that this is true, that death takes everyone sooner or later. Scripture fills in the details, declaring that death has come into the world because of sin. There are few people who will claim to be sinless; many, however, will take issue with the idea that their sin is enough to condemn them. The Lord, however, tells us that it is: You may only avoid death if you are perfectly holy, and none of us can claim that. So Days 6 and 7 are coming, and you have plenty of reminders. It may be the guilt of past errors that reminds you of your lack of holiness. It may well be twinges of pain or the attrition of age that constantly harps of Day 6. It may be the evening news and the constant reminders of how dangerous is this world in which we live. But death and the grave come to us all.

What are your options?

Well, you can deny it. Do everything possible to deny the truth that you eventually face death. Strive to look and act as young as possible, since aging is a reminder of decay. Furthermore, keep on with whatever sins you personally prefer, just to prove that they're doing nothing to hurt you-and that they actually make your life better. This is the ostrich syndrome, with one's head stuck in the sand. But ostriches die, too. Denying the truth does you no good, for it does not deliver you to your eighth day.

If you can't deny it, then maybe you should accept death-but dismiss life after. This strategy is a leading contender, the sort of thinking that pervades network TV. You didn't ask to be born and you can't keep from dying, so make the most of what you've got. In this philosophy, once again you get to keep on with whatever sin you like, because it simply doesn't matter: "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you may die." (Tragically, much of the eating, drinking and merry-making actually shortens life.) Furthermore, since life is essentially a meaningless accident, feel free to end it whenever you decide it no longer has the quality you desire. So goes popular thought today, but don't be deceived: Such a notion actually embraces death as a natural part of life. An embrace of Day 6 leaves you in the grip of the grave; it does not deliver you to the life of the eighth day.

So denying and accepting it don't seem to work; therefore, you have the option of trying to solve the problem. Many place their trust, then, in science and technology. For a sizeable fee, you can have your head or entire body frozen in the hope that you can be brought back to life, presumably before your estate runs out of money; but even if this were possible, it would bring you back to Day 5, only to face death again. Others place great faith in the discoveries of genetics, working to remove aging and disease and death right out of DNA; but there are all sorts of other ways to die. Now, do not misunderstand me: I am a fan of science, and I give thanks for the many ways that the gifts of science and medicine improve and prolong life. But while technology can make Days 1-5 better and Day 6 less painful, it can't get you to Day 8. It can't raise you from the dead to everlasting life.

What's left as a solution? There's religion, but be careful. Most religions teach some sort of afterlife, but cannot deliver. There are indeed some that reduce you to a minor cell of a greater organism, and tell you that you serve the greater good by living and then dying to help nourish the earth. This is not hope, but involuntary recycling. Most religious teachings, however, will tell you that you can earn your Day 8 by good works toward God and man. As with science, I'm a big fan of good works. However, we must ask this: If the good that you do is not enough to keep you from dying in the first place, how is it enough to raise you from the grave to everlasting life?

Those are the pretty much the options that man uses in order to deal with death. They all have a couple of things in common: All dismiss the resurrection of Jesus as nonsense, idle talk. Thus, all of them offer no real hope. No resurrection of the dead. No eighth day.

If you want hope, then hear these words: "Christ is risen."

Why does this give hope? First, hear what He is risen from. He is not just risen from the dead: He is risen from your death. Sinless and holy, the Lord Jesus Christ did not have to die for Himself; so He died for you. He carried the burden of your sins and sinfulness, your infirmities and afflictions to the cross. He dragged the entire curse of sin for all the world to Calvary and suffered God's judgment for it there. He has suffered your judgment before God, and He has died your death. Therefore, the Lord announces, "The price has been paid! I will not condemn you for your sin, because My Son has already served your sentence. Do not cling to your sin and resist rescue from it. Instead, repent! Confess the sin and trust that Christ has died for you; because if Christ has died your death, then all I have left to give you is His life!"

Hear that Good News again: Because Christ has died your death, the Lord now gives you His eternal life. This is the joy of Easter Sunday: Now that Christ has paid the price and suffered judgment and death on the cross, He is risen from the dead. He is not just risen "in spirit" or "in memory." He is risen-body and all.

Therefore, along with forgiveness and life, the Lord promises eternal healing. Those who have died in the Lord once suffered from pain and disease and injury. Their afflictions remain dead in the grave-but they live forever with no more suffering, because Christ is risen. This is your comfort as you mourn the loss of loved ones who died in Christ. This is also your comfort when death draws near for you: Christ is risen from the dead, and He will raise you from the dead. For the sake of your risen Lord, you have a Day 8 that will last forever.

We add one more note this day to the Church: Christ is risen, truly risen from the dead, and this determines our message to the world-we preach the forgiveness of sins and the life everlasting, and dare not stray from that proclamation. It is true enough that Christianity has much to teach about doing right and shunning wrong; but you can also learn such things apart from the Church, and sleep in on Sunday mornings to boot. It is true as well that church fosters a sense of community, that friendships are often forged within the congregation; but then again, friendships are also forged in bowling alleys and book clubs-where the seating is often much more cushioned. It is also true that what we teach here may well enable you to appreciate and enjoy life more; but once again, you can have an enjoyable life in this world without ever stepping foot inside the door of a church. In other words, God's Word speaks of our life here in days 1-5, but that is not the focus of His message. Rather, He warns us of sin, death and grave; and He announces to us the news that Christ has died for our sin, defeated death, and conquered the grave. Risen again, He will raise you.

Many different agencies will seek to provide help and advice for Day 1-7. We have the joy of proclaiming Day 8, eternal life in Christ. And if the Church ceases to proclaim that message, no one else will.

So we proclaim today: Christ is risen from the dead, and He has conquered sin, death and the devil. Do not cling to that sin which would lead you only to death and judgment, but confess it and be forgiven! Do not resign yourself to the fate of the grave, for the Lord has destroyed that prison once for all; rejoice that He has destroyed that prison for you. Do not buy into the lies of the devil, for the evil one is defeated and the days of his whispers are numbered. No, dear friends rejoice this day and proclaim the Christ is risen indeed! For if Christ is risen, you have hope. Unless He first returns, you must still face your Day 6 of death and Day 7 of the grave. But on the 8th day of your week, very early in the morning, the risen Lord Jesus will cry out to you: "Come forth and live!"-For you are forgiven for all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen