

It seems so very long ago, just 5 yrs, with CNN showing this church throughout the day that would not close, then a few days of people raging against us. Easter looked very different. How ironic, the Church, where God's people gather amidst perils throughout the ages; people whom know the Lord appointed them a time to be born, then come to their eternal rest, a people who cannot ever die. The Church where Jesus comes only for the sick, gathered unto the great Physician of soul and body -reacts in fear, most close. That Luther hymn we just sang, **when life and death hath contended**. Still today. Today, 477<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Johannes Bugenhagen receiving the crown of life. Someone you will meet. Every Lutheran should know the name, Johannes Bugenhagen, Martin Luther's pastor; very instrumental in the Reformation. When plague reached Wittenberg, the government ordered the healthy, the Wittenberg faculty, Luther and Bugenhagen, shut down the church, leave town, they defied the government, stayed. Luther writes A Mighty Fortress during plague. Luther and Bugenhagen, just added lots of Services, as the Church has done during many plagues, as we did here, lots of Services, only our duty as the Church. Your Lord lives, what can truly harm you? What is there to fear?

Your Life is filled with so much irony, what appears one thing on the surface, can be quite different. Look at all these beautiful people, look good, smell nice. Most of you. But on the inside it's more complicated, isn't it. Sinfully complicated, yet ironically, you're a saint, holy now, by His works, but it doesn't seem like it.

The Passion of Our Lord, full of irony: -Jesus calls His horrific death, His glory -Betrayed with a sign of affection. -Accused of blasphemy, while the accusers commit blasphemy. -People confessed Jesus deserves to die according to the Law; true, but not as they meant. -Also high priest said it was expedient that one man should die for the people. True, but not in the way he meant. -Legitimate trials for Jewish people cannot take place in darkness. -Greatest of situational irony, the will of the Father is the same as the mob. The Father wants Barabbas go free; Jesus to die in his place. -The people ask for Jesus blood to be on them and their children, killing Him is a just act; they're right but not in the way they meant. -He's pronounced innocent 5x, still condemned to death. -No epitaph, ever been so true, no accusation so precise, the mocking charge of Pilate: "Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews." -Even the devil was used by God for good. -For this most evil, unjust of all acts, the greatest good in all creation. How, where God loved the world, saved even the likes of you. -The irony throughout is caused by contrast between the gracious will of our Father and evil intentions of people. What is meant for evil, God always uses for good for His

people. That irony happens even in your days, why suffering, why evil, why me, so that the Lord can bring a greater good to you and draw you closer to Him. -The women should've known better as they go to anoint a dead body. But there is no irony about today.

Your life is full of irony, how often you don't realize all that's yours, live like it, act like it. You keep your head up. What did that angels declare to you today, **remember how He told you.**

80 yrs. ago. A great story of irony: A pastor, death-row inmate walked to the gallows together. The criminal stood above the trapdoor. Moments later, it would open to rope him into eternity. An officer asked, any final words. "I place all my confidence in the Lamb who made atonement for my sins. God have mercy on my soul," then he turned toward the man who'd been the shepherd of his soul, the one whose hand he received the body, blood of Jesus in the Supper. To this pastor, said, "I'll see you again." Then noosed, hooded, dropped out of this world into another. Many similar scenarios like this in history. When imminent death, men found repentance, faith. Not many atheists in foxholes.

What makes this so remarkable, so ironic -this man, others hanged that day, the most hated men in human history. Guilty of atrocities so horrific. These were Hitler's generals. Yet in the months leading up to their executions, many of them had been transformed from Hitler's wolves into Christ's lambs.

God worked through a farmboy from MO, LCMS pastor, reluctant chaplain to 15 war criminals during the Nuremberg trials. Pr. Gerecke went, cell by cell, invited them to chapel services. 15 chairs set up, 13 filled. Liturgy, hymns, prayers, catechized, hearts were changed. Lips once barked, "Heil Hitler!" now "Amen" as they knelt to receive the Sacrament.

When word came Pr Gerecke was going to be sent home, they wrote a letter to Mrs. Gerecke, begged her, have him stay. On that letter, signatures of all these former Nazis; had great power, rank now humbly beseeching an America housewife, who hadn't seen her husband in 3 years, let him stay. Her brief reply to husband, "They need you." A whole volume about sacrifice, love.

How ironic, these evil men, now in paradise. The scandal of Christianity is not these men went to heaven; but God loved them so much He dies to get them there, to draw them unto Himself. 65 years ago, Pr Gerecke entered the innumerable company of saints who'd gone before him, like one that said "I'll see you again." And he did. You will meet them too.

The irony you live. People can truly change by the power of God's Word. Irony that any of us should ever follow the world's advice. Irony, you must die to self to live. Your hope is not in your life, your dreams, nor with pagan wisdom of Facebook, Instagram or this world. Do not be so foolish, the worst

advice in the history of the world, that tells you to follow your heart, live your dreams, you be you.

Ironical this world tells you your identity is what you do, who you love, how you act. That is a lie. Your Lord lives! Your identity is determined by who He is. You, His baptized child, you are defined by Him. You, your life immeasurable worth because of whose you are. Ironical the world looks at look at insignificant you, and you are the reason the sun rose this day. You have more treasure, wealth than Elon Musk.

Ironical. You think you don't have much family. How often you think you're alone, that no one cares, that you're not loved, think God's not bothered by your daily issues. Ironical the way we act, often our homes don't seem like they're filled with baptized people living in the wake of Jesus death and resurrection. How ironical you spend so much time, energy, so much anxiety, so much effort, on things that will never satisfy you and live as if your risen Lord is not reign over all things or concerned about you every. single. day. Your life is His, has no end, you will never, ever, die. Do you realize what's yours? What you have?

Jesus' resurrection, eternal life sealed, in His Word, Sacraments. Do you grasp your reality? Changes everything for you. We're celebrating Easter not just because God died and rose, but because He gives you His resurrected life here, joined to Jesus. Heaven and earth comes together as in no other way. He feeds you His resurrected body and blood, medicine of immortality. Jesus says, **Whoever feeds on my flesh, drinks my blood has eternal life, I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, my blood is true drink.**

Your Lord lives, to carry your burdens, guide you, forgive you. To listen, answer your prayers and cries. To wipe away your tears; comfort you who mourn. Though you saw her lowered into the grave, you will throw your arms around grandma again. Your parent you attended at their bedside in brokenness of body, will embrace you again. Though you held the hand of your beloved as you felt the life depart, you will hold them in the kingdom of God. Though your heart was crushed beyond despair by the loss of child. Christ will place them in your arms again, mothers will not lose their children and usher us all into eternity.

I always say to those on their deathbed, "I will see you again." Maybe you've said it. Not a promise I can keep. It is a promise our risen Lord keeps. Your Lord lives -no such thing as...the end. You're still celebrating Easter with your loved one in Christ, join your song to theirs before His throne. It's happening. Bask in the beautiful reality of this day. **Remember how He told you**, the answer to all your life's irony, the answer for your greatest needs. Der Chrsitus ist auferstanden. The Lord is risen...