

INI

1 John 5,4-12

Easter 1 — Quasimodogeniti — 12 April 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Epistle lesson, which was read earlier:

He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: Today, people are living longer and longer. On average, women live longer than men by several years. The average life expectancy at birth in the United States is 76 years for men and 81 years for women.

One of the main reasons people are living longer is due the elimination of childhood diseases. In ages past, if a person could live past childhood, then that person had a good chance of living to an old age.

In the England of Queen Elizabeth, for example, 55 percent of the population died before their tenth birthday. It did not matter if you were rich or poor. Queen Anne, who lived 70 years after Queen Elizabeth, had ten children; only one of them survived birth, and that son died when he was eleven. Those are grim statistics.

People, however, are always trying to push the limits of medical science and try to squeeze out a few more years of life. Today, there are firms which will freeze a person's body at death. This is the science of cryogenics. The idea is that a person can be put into a deep freeze and perhaps be woken up hundreds of years after death when there is a cure

for whatever killed him or her. Cancer? AIDS? Old age? Whatever. The idea pushes the limits of science fiction. Science fiction or not, people are paying for this – think of the head of baseball great Ted Williams.

All this points to the desire that people want to live. Deep down inside, people know that death is not natural and they want to cling to life, to prolong life, to extend life.

The desire to live was no less true for those living in the days of Jesus and the apostles. The Apostle John quite clearly tells us in Whom life is to be found, and that of course is no other than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. John even goes on and says that there is no life apart from Jesus. This brings me to the theme of today's sermon: "**God's True Life Extension Program.**" I'll develop this theme in three points:

- 1) Two Kinds Of Life;**
- 2) The True Witnesses To True Life;** and,
- 3) God's True Life Extension Program.**

1) Two Kinds Of Life. Throughout the ages people have faced the question of life and death, and all other things being equal, have opted for life in the face of death. One would almost think this is a no brainer.

There is a joke that drives this home – and I've told this before. A pastor is preaching and asks the congregation: "How many want to go to heaven?" There is a chorus of "Amens." Then the pastor asks those who want to go to heaven to raise their hands. All but one raised their hands. The pastor looks at the one man whose hand was now raised and asks, "Mister Jones, I see you haven't raised your hand. Why is that?" Jos replied, "Well pastor, I sure want to go to heaven, but I thought you meant right now!"

The point is that there is a distinction between what we call biological life and spiritual life.

Biological life is all around us. It's spring time, and all around us plants are growing. Trees that had shed their leaves are now budding, if not yet in full bloom. The days are getting longer and there is more sun. Many animals give birth at this time of year.

But biological life has a beginning and an end. Come the fall, growth slows or in many instances stops, and even in California, some trees shed their leaves.

For animals and humans, there is no set time when life comes to an end. It could be age, illness, or accident that take their toll.

For us humans, it means that life can be all too brief. The Bible describes this fact.

David describes life as a shadow.

For we are strangers before You, [O Lord], and sojourners, as were all our fathers; our days on earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding. (1 Chronicles 29,15)

James describes life as a vanishing vapor.

Whereas you know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even as a vanishing vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away. (James 4,14)

Moses says our life is limited in years and even our own strength cannot prolong life indefinitely.

For all our days are passed away in Your wrath,
We spend our days as a tale that is told.
The days of our years are threescore and ten;
And if by reason of strength they be fourscore,
Yet their strength is labor and sorrow ;
For it is soon cut off and we fly away. (Psalm 90,9-10)

But there is another dimension to life, that is, a spiritual dimension.

Moses again wrote in Psalm 90:

So teach us to number our days,
That we may apply ourselves to wisdom. (Psalm 90,12)

What is this wisdom?

It is more than that which Solomon wrote about in Ecclesiastes, when he looked at life and wrote of a time to be born and a time to die (Ecclesiastes 3,2). That's just the biological rhythm.

There is a wisdom, however, which comes from above, from God Himself, and which clearly tells us that there is a spiritual dimension to life.

The spiritual dimension of life, however, is not divorced from or separate from the physical dimension of life.

The wisdom which God shows us He shows us only through His Son, Jesus. It is only in Jesus that God shows us what true life is, and to this He has given us:

2) The True Witnesses To True Life. In the face of death, God has given us a sure testimony that He sent His Son Jesus into our world to live and die for us, to live and die for us as true man and as true God. To this, God offers us the witness of the water and the blood.

Water and the blood. What does this phrase mean?

When he wrote, John had to combat false teachers who had arisen and falsely taught things about Jesus. These false teachers said that God sent His Spirit and adopted the man Jesus at Jesus' Baptism and that was when Jesus became God. Thus, as the God-Man, Jesus taught and performed miracles. But before Jesus was crucified the Spirit left Jesus and Jesus only died as a man.

Paul Kretzmann puts it well:

Here John shows that the foundation of our faith is absolutely firm and certain, since it rests upon the powerful testimony of God Himself.

Jesus is He Who came through the water and the blood; not in water alone, but in water and blood. And the Spirit is He that testifies, because the Spirit is the Truth.

Here the two principal events in the life of Jesus are set before our eyes; namely, His Baptism, by which he entered upon His public ministry, and His suffering and death, through which he crowned His work of redemption.

These two events prove with special force that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world.

He accepted Baptism intended for sinners and thereby declared His willingness to make full satisfaction for the sins of the world.

He shed His blood and gave His life into death for the reconciliation of the world.

And it was not only His first willingness to undertake the work of salvation which counted, but the shedding of His blood, His suffering and death.

Of these facts the Spirit of God in the Gospel bears witness, testifying without ceasing that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. (Paul Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible, New Testament*, vol. 2:576)

By using the title Christ, which means “Anointed One” or “Messiah,” John leaves us without doubt as to who Jesus is.

Jesus came to make full satisfaction for our sins and buy us back from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

These three ancient enemies of ours, of humankind, would continually try to deceive us. They try to trick us by using different

strategies, some of which even may be contradictory.

They say, “Death is natural. It’s part of the rhythm of life.” But that’s a lie!

Death was not part of God’s creation. Death came into the world on account of sin.

The enemies say that either no price need be paid for sin, or, if a price need be paid, we can pay it ourselves. All that’s needed, they say, is a good life. But that’s a lie!

We can never be good enough. The passing grade on God’s goodness test is perfection. We aren’t perfect – and we always fall short of perfection! That which is born of flesh is flesh, it sins, and it will die.

But the witnesses say that in the face of death Jesus triumphed over the grave. And because He lives, we who believe in Jesus, that he died and rose for us, will live also.

It is only in Jesus that God gives us:

3) God’s True Life Extension Program. Life extension begins now, and it begins in Jesus. For His entire life, Jesus was really and truly God and man. He came to redeem all of us, both body and spirit, so that we might live with Him.

Childless couples often turn to adoption as a way to have children. There is no shortage of children to be adopted, but often these are passed over because they have some kind of handicap.

But you know what? God adopts us in Christ in spite of our handicap, the handicap of sin. It’s a handicap all of us have to wrestle with our entire lives. It’s a handicap that makes itself evident both physically and spiritually.

Life extension in Jesus begins with a birth from above. This is the new birth that Jesus gives us, a birth of water and the Word in Holy

Baptism, a baptism into His death but also into His resurrection. Here we are to die to sin and live anew before God. What does Baptism work? It works forgiveness of sins, and where there is forgiveness of sins there is life and salvation.

Life extension in Jesus is a continual nourishment that is better than any earthly diet or mega-vitamin program.

In Jesus, God comes to nourish us whether we are young or old, healthy or sick, rich or poor.

He nourishes us through that wonderful life-giving Word of forgiveness which we hear in church or when we read the Bible. He nourishes us as we gather around the Holy Table of the Lord as He feeds us with Jesus' true Body and Blood, given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sins.

In the midst of a world in which we all too often feel powerless, feel the ravages of age, of illness, of handicap, of violence, of upheaval of all kinds, John assures us in Christ we have overcome the world, that is, we have been forgiven for Jesus' sake.

Conclusion: All too often, the world, our flesh, and the devil would have us seek solutions as to how to extend life, how to prolong our days so that we do not feel as if we are continually walking under the shadow of death.

Yes, on this earth we walk in the shadow of death, and regardless of how long we live, our flesh always tell us there could be more.

Some turn to cryogenics, freezing the body and hoping that in the centuries to come they might be unfrozen when a cure to whatever felled them is discovered.

Some turn to the hope that by their own efforts and apart from Jesus they can please God and so merit eternal life.

Some wish to deny sin and say that the cycle of life and death is

part of nature and that this is the best for which we can hope.

But God says that in His Son, Jesus Christ, He has provided the only solution to life extension.

Jesus has paid the price for sin with His own death. On the third day He rose from the dead, never to die again.

His resurrection is the light of life which dispels the shadow of death. In the forgiveness of sins He shares His light with us.

We sing:

Upon the Cross extended,
See world, thy Lord, suspended. (TLH 171,1)

On the Cross, Jesus was extended and suspended for us, so that in the forgiveness of sins He might extend life to us, life in this world which then is brought to perfection and bliss in the life to come. Here is the true life extension program that in Jesus lasts for eternity. Amen.

Now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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