

**Brothers and Sisters, Grace to you and peace from God our Father
And the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

There is an old phrase that says “seeing is believing.” Peter had to run to the tomb and look for himself... He didn’t walk, he ran... And he was amazed! Can you imagine how his head was spinning? He had just lived through one of his worst nightmares...

He must have been thinking a hundred miles an hour... And he must have been asking himself, that question we always ask-- **What does this mean?** What is the truth here and how does it all fit together?

This is a story we see through faith. I wasn’t physically there; I didn’t see it. And yet through faith, I do believe it. I do see incredible truth in this story, and honestly, I can say I believe it because I’ve seen it. Seeing is believing...

This morning I want to reflect with this verse, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.” This whole idea of life overcoming death. Let me share some stories of things I have seen and have come to believe.

I was nine years old when my Grandpa Johnson died. Until that time, I don’t think I had ever grasped the meaning of death; or I guess I just hadn’t thought about it very much. And to be honest, I remember it being a rather disturbing time for me.

It was a shock to realize that everyone died, and that death was final. I remember standing by my mom and my older brother at the coffin, saying our last good byes... she reached in and took grandpa's watch and gave it to my brother. I don't know why I remember that so much, but it became a vivid reminder to me that my grandpa's time had run out.

I wondered where my grandpa Johnson had gone; did he go to heaven, or did he go to hell. And I started dwelling on that eternal damnation thing. That's pretty scary stuff for a youngster.

It was also around that age, I had terrible nightmares. The dreams would start by my being out in a field walking, and then I would notice off in the distance, a Lion... I had nowhere to hide.

The lion would start walking toward me. Then he would start running directly at me, I would try to yell for help, but no words would come out, and I would try to run, but my legs were like cement, I couldn't move them.

I was paralyzed with fear. Then just as the lion would be ready to lunge, I would wake up in a terrible panic, catching my breath, trying to get my bearings. If you've ever had those kinds of nightmares, you know in your body what terror feels like. It paralyzing, you are bound up with death and there is absolutely nothing you can do.

I used to think that being chased by that lion was literally like being chased by death. When I was young, death looked so far away, but I always knew it might find me and rush at me at any time. And like it was in my dreams, death brought me anxiousness, fear, paralysis... Let's be honest, I think we've all had some similar experiences.

In a very real way death and dying has a strange power over us. The apostle Paul used the phrase "the sting of death." It is a power that causes us fear and anxiousness, and we all deal with it differently.

Some of us find relief in running away from death; we distract ourselves, preoccupy ourselves with entertainment, we pay lots of money for health care, we pretend death will never happen to us, we don't look at it. It's a form of magical thinking and ultimately not helpful.

The problem with this magical thinking is that eventually it will run directly into reality. As we say on Ash Wednesday, "you are dust, and to dust you shall return." If we don't integrate an honest appreciation of our mortality, we will be shocked as our magical thinking crumbles, as our belief structure falls hopelessly apart.

Some of us, instead of ignoring the fact we will die, we go in the opposite direction-- we give in to death and dwell in the fear of dying. We stare at death like deer in the headlights. When we give into this fear, we become like living dead people.

We become paralyzed, we become anxious and self-absorbed. And instead of reaching out to love our neighbor, we curl in on ourselves. We come up with all kinds of excuses and reasons why we can't do this or do that. Do you know anybody like that?

So, you see, death has a power over us. And we tend to either ignore it or let it scare us to death. And neither option is life giving. As Jesus always does, he provides a third way—resurrection! Imagine a world where that nightmare of being chased is transformed into a dream of being embraced in love and belonging.

Sometimes when a person is in hospice, and I have the privilege to journey with them. I'll ask if they've had any dreams. And sometimes I hear the most remarkable stories. I hear dreams about visits, conversations with loved ones who've already passed away.

People don't always share these dreams because they think others might judge them. But I believe it's God's way of defeating the power of death. It's God's way of bringing resurrection into our worst nightmares.

As Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." Life is snatched out of the power of death.

When I was young, after waking up from a terrible nightmare, I would run downstairs and jump next to my Dad in bed. Feeling the security of my father close to me, I could go back to sleep. God's presence is like that.

And exactly because of that presence, I can imagine a new and different dream. In my new dream, I'm walking alone in a field; I'm older, my legs are slow and feel like cement. And far off on the horizon I see something that I'm not sure about. I initially think it's that lion, always present; and I think about hiding, but my legs move too slowly. I stand and squint, and slowly I see that its two people walking toward me.

As they get closer, I recognize that one is my Grandpa Johnson, the other is Jesus. And suddenly my legs feel younger and I can run. Head over heels I scramble, like a small boy, up into my grandpa's arms. Jesus wipes away our tears as we begin our journey home. That's my resurrection dream.

When the gales of death threaten to break us and drive us inward and fearful, God is present to take our hand. God is always in the middle of things, calming our anxiousness, healing our fears, and bringing us into compassionate relationship.

The good news this morning is that Jesus has conquered death. We are people of resurrection, He is Risen...

He is Risen...

Jesus transforms our worst nightmares into faith, hope, and love... And I believe it, because I've seen it... Now, what does your resurrection dream look like?

Amen.