

Date Preached	17-Apr-2022	Date Initiated	05-Apr-2022
Where Preached	SAK	Appointed Readings	Easter Day, All Yrs

" I shall not die, but *live!* "



Time. It seems like our ultimate enemy: A foe we can neither overcome nor reason with. An adversary, both universal and unswerving, that rules everything from how long we brush our teeth in the morning to how many years we will walk this earth. Now, time isn't *only* an enemy: It births babies ... graduates us from school ... and turns winter into spring. But our most frequent and familiar experience of time lies in its scarcity ... its seemingly always running out on us: the day ends before we accomplish half the things we planned to do; the deadline comes before we're prepared to make the tough decision; our spouse dies before we're ready to say goodbye.<sup>1</sup>

What would it be like to be delivered from the constraints of time ... to live in a world without timers and time-outs and 'times up'? What if time were merely something we existed *in*, like air or sunlight, rather than something we're always straining *against*? Such freedom is, I think, the song the Easter psalmist<sup>2</sup> sings so exuberantly: "I shall not die, but live!" And it is the very gift of Easter: our forever deliverance into the Eternity of God.

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In the days leading up to His Death, Jesus is very much the victim of time. An unruly crowd can't see Him executed **quickly enough**. His disciples can't stay awake **long enough** to spend His final night with Him. And in the end, with too little oxygen in His body for **too long** ... He dies.

But then, the miracle of Easter. The once-crucified Jesus stirs in the cold, dark Tomb. The suffocated Savior once again draws a breath. The Son of Man ... having succumbed to the expiration date time cruelly stamps upon every living creature ... once again senses the light of the rising sun, slitting through a gap between the wall and door of His Tomb. He unwraps the cloth wound tightly about His head, in order to see the light—to bask in it; to drink in the deliciousness of living *again* ... and *forever*. "I shall not die, but live!" says Christ.

God has decided<sup>3</sup> the Cross' gracious gift of salvation is not enough. "I have forever forgiven My creatures all their sins," God says, "but I *also* want them to enjoy Me—and I them—eternally!" And so, Jesus rises from no-life to new-life and completely reprograms our relationship *with* time, for *all* time. Because God's highest desire<sup>4</sup> is for us to dwell in God without any limit or constraint, the Father raises Jesus from death and clothes humanity with the eternity of God. "You shall not die, but live!" says the Father.

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<sup>1</sup> Not that we're *ever* really ready.

<sup>2</sup> The psalms were, of course, all written centuries before Jesus' glorious Resurrection. The Church's lectionary, however, appoints for Easter the same portion of Psalm 118, every year.

<sup>3</sup> I am taking (broad) homiletical license here: This has been God's plan from the start, not something that God improvises in the moment. Jesus' prior predictions of His own death have referred to His rising again, as well.

<sup>4</sup> So far as we can *speculate*, for who may truly know the mind of God?

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We are most accustomed to pondering—to accepting; to seizing; to giving thanks for—the gift of eternal life that is the Easter Resurrection in the context of death: As His disciples, we are bold in our confidence ... we are comforted and reassured ... that we shall not cease to exist when we have drawn our last earthly breath. And I stand before you this day, my friends, to testify: "We shall not die, but live!" Alleluia!

And ... *and* ... Christ's precious gift of eternity is not just future, but also present; not merely some "Get out of death free" card to tuck away until we need it ... but also the realization that we live in Holy Eternity *right now!* On that first Easter morning, Christ liberated us from earthly time—from the tyranny of clocks and calendars; the suffocation of agendas and appointments—and launched us on the infinite ray of God's own timelessness.

"You shall not die, but live," Christ tells us when we **grieve not** apologizing for an old hurt or making amends for a bygone failing or falling short; when we wish we'd reached out to someone who drifted—or stormed—away from us years (or decades) ago. "It's not too late," Christ assures us. "My grace loops through you like an eternal river. Go forth and *try*, again."

"You shall not die, but live," Christ tells us when we're beset by pangs of longing for the loved ones who have slipped this earthly life. "You can pray for them and talk to them; smile with them and cry with them," Christ comforts us. "While you achingly *miss*, you can also joyfully *commune* ... because in being raised from the dead, I've raised *them* from the dead. I hold both them and you to My breast, in one-and-the-same Eternity. Go forth and *love*, again."

"You shall not die, but live," Christ tells us when we lament—or are shamed by—what we didn't find time to do last week, last month or, indeed, last *ever*: the people we didn't help; the blessings we didn't count or enjoy; the paths of faith we didn't explore ... the journeys of love we didn't take. "In My Resurrection," Christ tells us, "you already live in the Eternal Light, where the possibilities of your limitless future, in Me, will always eclipse **whatever the failings** of your past. Go forth and *live*, again."

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"I shall not die, but live!" It is the song of Easter. It is the song of the Risen Christ, vanquishing time's most potent—but ultimately powerless—weapon: death. It is the song of the dying Christian, serene in the faith that the last gasp in this world is also the first sweet breath of Heaven.

And it is our song, too: an Easter people who realize, once more, in joy and peace, that there is no "too late" ... there is **no "no more"** ... there is no "the end": but only the Eternity that God, through Our Savior's Resurrection, has ordained we shall spend in God's love and grace. "We shall not die, but live!" "Go forth and *be*, again." Alleluia! Alleluia!



*The Rev Douglas S Worthington  
St Andrew's Parish  
Kent, CT*