

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We're hearing a lot about death these days, the death tolls in other countries, in our own state/county.

In fact, we as a society are temporarily making drastic changes to our lives to stem its threat.

Many people are scared of it, whether for themselves or others, or both.

And the temptation to fear it is found in Christians and unbelievers alike.

Death is always around us, it always has been since the Fall, but for the grand majority of our lives we are often able to ignore it, not think about it, or avoid it.

(Unless, of course, you work in a few of the professions that deal with it all the time.)

Instead we try to concentrate on this life, the pursuit of happiness here and now, or at least the avoidance of pain and suffering... and death.

But then there are times when we can't avoid thinking about death, like terrorist attacks, war, pandemics, the sudden death of a famous athlete/star, the expected death of a loved one, or the reality of your own, whether through illness or age.

And the more we think about it, the more temptation there can be to fear it.

So perhaps this pandemic has come at a good time for us in the Christian Church.

Holy Week and Easter loom large on the horizon.

During the season of Lent, our focus and concentration is on the passion and death of our Lord.

So it is a good time to think about death, not just our own, but especially His,

because His death has meaning regarding our own.

And the more we concentrate on His death and the fact that He is no longer dead,

the more we see the reality of the transitory nature of our own death in Him;

the more we can rightly concentrate not only on life here and now, but life eternal with Him.

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the Lord had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with Him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with Him. ^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. ^(John 17:17)

Two weeks ago we heard about the tragedy that was the Golden Calf.

After only 40 days since making a covenant with the Lord, that they would be His people and He their God, the Israelites had broken loose, and disgracefully worshiped an idol, a non-god. As a result, God threatened to destroy the whole nation who broke His covenant; Moses ordered the Levites to kill about 3,000 men who had violated the covenant; God threatened to destroy Aaron for his part in leading the people astray; and the Lord sent a plague on the people.

Of course, being out in the wilderness, all God had to do was simply stop the water and the manna for a week or two.

There was the threat and reality of death all around them all the time... and especially now.

But Moses had stayed the Lord's hand from wiping out the nation... and Aaron.

He interceded for them, not based upon their own merits or goodness, but upon the Lord's goodness.

Moses wrestled with God in prayer on behalf of the Israelites and his brother.

For another 40 days and nights, Deuteronomy tells us, Moses lay prostrate before the Lord, fasting, neither eating nor drinking, as he interceded for the people.

He used God's own promises against Him, that He would bring this people to the Promised Land.

He used God's own slowness to anger and abundance in steadfast love to move Him to relent.

In fact, Moses even put himself between God and Israel and told the Lord to blot him out of the book

He had written if the Lord would not forgive their sin.

He used God's favor with him (on account of his faith), to extend God's mercy upon the people.

The people, on their part, also reacted to the threat of punishment and death, hoping for God's mercy.

After witnessing the deaths of those 3,000 and the plague upon them, it was a very real threat.

As a sign of their contrition, of their sorrow over their sin,

they stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Horeb (Mt. Sinai) onward. Exodus 33:6

They repented of their sins and we're told that when Moses walked by to speak with God,

and they **saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent of meeting,**

all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. vs.10

At this time, there was no one in the official position of High Priest designated by the Lord.

That wouldn't come until the Lord ordained Aaron (yes, the same Aaron who made the golden calf) as the High Priest.

But we see Moses serving in this role, don't we?

He was the one who ordered the sacrifices for the first covenant.

He was now the one offering prayers of intercession on behalf of the people,

even bearing upon himself the weight of their sin, though he was not guilty of it.

This is what he was doing when he told the Lord to blot him out of the Book

if the Lord would not forgive their sins.

He was saying he would not live under such an unforgiving God.

Our text this morning is the outcome of Moses' conversations with God on Mt. Sinai.

This account is unique in all of Scripture... well almost unique in all of Scripture.

Here a mortal man got to see the fading glory of the Lord.

But even though this glory was fading, it still left its mark on Moses.

We are told that his face shone, reflecting the light and glory of the Lord's presence.

Interestingly, we're also told that he didn't realize it.

Aaron and the people were scared of this supernatural light and didn't want to come near him. But notice Moses' reaction. He didn't lord it over them and in pride or keep them back.

Instead, **he called to them** and invited them **to come near, and he talked with them.**

He had spent all that time and energy, bearing their burdens, their idolatry, & interceding for them, he wasn't going to push them away now.

And at the same time, when he spoke to them on God's behalf, he let the glory of the Lord shine to impress upon them that this was not his word but the Lord's Word,

it wasn't His will, but the Lord's will, not his forgiveness, but the Lord's forgiveness.

Isn't this what we see with Christ and us as well?

We are the ones who have committed idolatry, who fear death instead of the Lord.

We are the ones who have loved ourselves and selfishly hoarded what others needed, cared little or not at all about the life, health and well-being of our neighbors, those close to home or around the world.

We are the ones who defiantly and proudly boast a young healthy body and immune system, and put our trust there instead of in our Lord's mercy and grace.

And yet, He is the innocent One who has interceded for us.

Who used His perfect favor as the One and only One, with whom God was well-pleased, and yet bore upon Himself all your sins and took the punishment of death for you.

He is the One who had God count Him as THE sinner, THE loveless, proud, idolator.

He is the One and ONLY ONE who not only interceded,

but took on our punishment, was willing to be blotted out of God's grace and favor, and shed His blood as the sacrifice for our sins.

He was not afraid of death though He bore the burden of the world's sins upon Him.

He went to death willingly, giving His body up for torture, His reputation up for slander,

His blood on the altar of the cross as the blood of the new covenant,

a new testament that purifies, sanctifies, and cleanses you from all unrighteousness.

At Christmas we sang, "Veiled in flesh, the God-head see, Hail the incarnate diety!"

Jesus was the only other person we know about that ever had a shining face because of God's presence.

But while Moses' face reflected God's glory, Jesus' face shone with it as the origin of that light.

He displayed this glory once, before a select group and told them not to speak of it until the Son of Man was glorified in His death and risen from the dead.

Jesus did not proudly flaunt His God-hood. Nor does He repel those for whom He died.

And yet, this is the natural reaction of guilty consciences to God's glory, to holy things.

We try separate ourselves from them.

This is why people are inclined, according to their sinful natures, to avoid church

when they know they are sinning but aren't repentant,

or when they feel guilty about something (whether they did it or it was done to them)

and don't feel worthy to be in the presence of God.

But Jesus calls us to Himself. He hides His glory now so that we, in our sinful state, will not hide.

Instead He draws near to us veiled in words printed on a page and spoken by His minister,

in water, wine and bread blessed by that same Word.
These are the holy things, the things drenched in His life-giving, sanctifying blood.
These are ways in which He tells you and gives to you and seals to you His forgiveness,
bought and paid for.

As we come into the presence of these holy things, it is natural for us to have some apprehension.
We wouldn't dare draw near them if God had not first spoken to us as His redeemed children,
or washed us in His fountain of forgiveness.
We would not presume to take and eat and drink the body and blood of God
if He had not commanded and invited us to do so.

So with the proper fear of God's almighty and merciful glory,
we draw near to Him in Word and Sacrament with the somberness that we would going to death,
But then face our death with the joy and confidence that we approach His veiled presence
in Word and Sacrament, as those that have passed from death to life.

Thanks be to God.

Soli Deo Gloria