

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Let's Live the Easter Life



LIFELINES

by Rev. Dr. Gerhard Michael Jr.
President, Florida-Georgia District

In a tribute to the Rev. Israel Isidor, the first president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Haiti, who died from spinal meningitis Palm Sunday, Jay Brinkmeyer wrote about the positive, evangelical witness with which Pastor Isidor had touched him personally. He concluded his remarks with the following:

"It is fitting that the first song that Pastor Israel ever taught me was a Haitian song called 'Lavi,' and the first verse proclaims, 'Alive, Alive, Alive forevermore. My Jesus is alive, Alive forevermore.'" He then adds this comment, "Pastor Israel is now with Jesus, alive forevermore."

Jay's comments are noteworthy because he had been actively involved with Pastor Isidor, providing help to our partner church as it sought to respond to the many opportunities there. Through their work together he came to know Pastor Isidor as one alive in Christ, even before his death, eager to share his faith at every turn.

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I share this excerpt from Jay's tribute, because I believe it's a good way for me to introduce my column this month. We have just celebrated the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is alive, never to die again. What He told Martha in John 11 is true for us, too: "I am the resurrection and the

life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." (vv. 25,26)

As we take Jesus at His word, we recognize that the resurrection is not just future, but takes place already now. Through faith in the Living One, life is new; life is different; life is open, not closed. Life does not end with death, for life finds its vitality in its relationship with Jesus Christ (=faith), and He has conquered death. He lives, and so the one who trust in Him lives, too — beginning now but lasting forever!

What is extremely comforting is that this new reality is sealed to us in Holy Baptism. This new life is not just a subjective feeling, but is rooted in a concrete, historical act. By the mystery of God's Word joining water, we are united with Jesus Christ, the beneficiaries of His death and resurrection. Paul writes in Romans 6, "We were buried with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (v. 4)

The next verses draw out the conclusions of this miraculous union: "For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His." (v.5) The grave does not hold the last word. Life does, and it lasts forever, because we will be raised from the dead, even as Jesus was.

Paul then ends this unit of Romans 6 with the letter's first imperative, "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." (v.11) Being united with Jesus in His death and resurrection has implications for us now. We are to live the resurrection life, even in the midst of a world that is marked in many ways by death (greed, fear, hatred, lying, apathy, unhappiness, etc.), and for that reason I wish to encourage you, "Let's live the Easter life!"

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How might that reflect itself in our everyday attitudes, words, and actions? For starters, I think of the Apostle Paul as he wrote to the Philippians. He was imprisoned, awaiting trial, a trial that

could result in his acquittal or his execution. The new life he had in Christ colored how he faced this crisis: "For me to live is Christ; to die is gain." (1:21)

His attitude was one of calm serenity and confident hope as he faced the possibility of death, because he knew that death had met its master in Jesus Christ. He had risen from the grave. Paul did not need to fear his execution; death would not be the end, but the gateway to a fuller life, that of being with Jesus.

Paul did not stop with thinking about his own situation. The Easter life

At the heart of this new, Easter life has to be the forgiveness of sins, for we all slip into the old way of sin and death. Forgiveness releases us from this bondage and frees us to live the new life. Received from God, we share it with one another.

embraces others. His mind ran to consider the well-being of the Philippians. He wanted them to mature in the faith, to learn how they could live beyond self-interest. The new life we have in Christ not only goes beyond the grave but even now looks out for others. As he weighs the options of death and life, he writes, "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith." (1:23b-25) The Easter life is a life of love!

In Peter's first little letter, he exclaims the Lord's praises because he and his fellow Christians had been born anew to "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1:3) Born anew through the living and abiding word of God (1:23, most likely a reference to their baptism!), they were called to live a new life, "the Easter life."

The Easter life means a strenuous love of one another (1:22; 4:8); getting rid of all malice, guile, insincerity, envy and slander (2:1). It means being built into the temple of the church to offer sacrifices which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ — obviously including their worship in the Christian community but also their witness and service in the world.

The Easter life includes "proclaiming the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." (2:9)

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The next unit of his letter calls us to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against the soul (2:11); we are to maintain good conduct among the Gentiles that their behavior will draw people to trust in God too, that on the day of judgment, they might be included among those who believe (v. 12).

What might the passions of the flesh include? The following section deals with a variety of areas in which we are called to live out the new life: government, the work place and our relationships at home. The key theme seems to be "submission" (2:13, 18;

3:1,7), a call to counter fleshly passion to assert ourselves and get our own way. Because I have been put right with God through faith in Jesus Christ and have all things in Him, I don't have to insist on my rights; I can forego them for the good of others. By my submissive spirit, I can testify to the sure and certain hope I have in the resurrection.

The Easter life lives in the light of eternity, seeking to resist that which would pull us away from trust in the living Christ. It strives to keep sane and sober for its prayers, knowing that prayer is the articulation of one's relationship with God. (4:7).

Living in the light of eternity means that whatever gift one has, he or she will want to use it for the good of others, to build them up, that they may be made strong in their relationship with God and God may be glorified. We seek to keep our love strong and our hospitality gracious. (4:8-11)

At the heart of this new, Easter life has to be the forgiveness of sins, for we all slip into the old way of sin and death. Forgiveness releases us from this bondage and frees us to live the new life. Received from God, we share it with one another. Through the lively breath of the Holy Spirit, we are made new creatures and receive the peace of the Lord (John 20:19-23). Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we need not be stuck in the sins of the old life, but can be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. (I Corinthians 15:17,20,58)

Because Jesus has been raised, let's live the Easter life — and make a difference in His world!

-gcm

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INTERESTS

Haiti Church President Dies

Rev. Israel Izidor, founding president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Haiti, died of meningitis March 20 in Les Cayes, Haiti. A funeral service was held Saturday, March 26, at First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Les Cayes.

Izidor, 54, studied theology at Concordia Theological Seminary-Fort Wayne. He was ordained in 1992 and began mission work in Les Cayes that same year, hosting worship services and a school for 20 children in his home.

Izidor was known for his enthusiasm and dedication to sharing the Gospel, according to Dr. Douglas Rutt, associate professor of pastoral ministry and missions at Concordia Theological Seminary and former area secretary for Latin America with LCMS World Mission.

Izidor "was a visionary leader who did the work of an evangelist with great joy and extraordinary zeal," Rutt said. The Haiti church body, he added, "will certainly sense the loss of a great leader and guiding light who has been an inspiration to many."

Izidor is survived by his wife, Leonie; children Yelline (Genet) Gelin, Ketura, Ezechias and Israelson; three sisters; and four brothers. □