



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

April 6, 2014

Pastor Randy Ott

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

First Lesson: [2 Kings 4:18-37](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 115](#)

Second Lesson: [Romans 8:11-19](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 11:21-37](#)

Sermon Text: [Romans 8:11-19](#)

### **Islands in the Son: An Island Paradise that Does Not End After Two Weeks**

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

This Lenten season on the Sundays that are in Lent but not of Lent, we've been looking at islands of refreshment and seeing how even on the Sundays in the Penitential season we rejoice in the victory that Christ has won for us and learning things about that victory that he has won for us. We've been using the picture of an island of paradise, something at this time of the year some people go to, something that we all would love to go to. The thing about the island of paradise is that you go away to it at this time of the year, but you have to come back, right? You go there for a vacation. You're there and you enjoy it, but then it's over.

This morning as we look at this island of refreshment that our Lord has won for us through Christ, we see it's an island of paradise that never comes to an end. Christ has defeated our greatest enemy, which is death. The power of the devil is sin and the power of sin is death. Christ has defeated it, as we have seen in the all readings today. So even though we die, we know we're going to an island of perfection, and it's not like we are going to have to leave it and come back to our everyday life.

Sometimes one of the things about getting ready to go on vacation, I don't know about you, but for me sometimes when you are getting ready to be gone for a few weeks, it's kind of miserable in the week leading up to it, isn't? Everything you have to get done, everything you have to get laid out for people, everything you have to take care of... you have an animal at home that you can't take with you, so you have to find someone to feed the animal. You have to figure this out and that out. You have to get things lined up maybe at work. You have to get stuff done. So you are so stressed out that you just can't wait to get there because you've been running around with your head cut off for a little while and chasing your tail, even though you probably don't have one. That's kind of the way it is getting ready for vacation sometimes.

Did you notice our God tells us kind of the same thing in what I read to you from Romans 8? If you look there at the end, it says, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed." Right now the life we live

is in a world that is still affected by sin. Because it's a world still affected by sin, we have suffering. We have the present sufferings. We have things that we have to endure. We have things that we have to go through. They aren't fun. They aren't pleasant. Some of them are to such an extreme that you wouldn't wish them on anyone. But you know people that have gone through them, and no doubt you have gone through things like that. Sometimes you wonder, what's the point? Why does it have to be so hard?

Friday night I was out in South Dakota working on our house. I went down to my brother-in-law's bar afterwards and sat there. I had a huge piece of meat, a ribeye. It had to be a pound of meat that I ate. It was good. That was nice. But as we sat there and visited, different people came in. I saw a guy come in pretty late who I hadn't talked to in awhile. The last time I talked to him, we talked for 3-4 hours. This guy had a life that was falling apart. I don't know how much of what he tells me is the truth. I don't know how much of it is just a bunch of BS. But I saw him and went over and talked to him. We sat and we talked for another couple of hours, until my brother-in-law kicked us out.

I was talking to this guy who has been married twice and divorced. He has four kids. He doesn't get to see his kids like he wants. Work kind of stinks. As we were talking, he says, "Why does life have to be so hard? Why does it have to be so hard? Why does God make it so hard on me? Why can't it be easier?" What would you say to him? What would you tell him? You've probably had conversations like that with people at times, haven't you? You might have even had those thoughts. Maybe you were on that side of the conversation. Why? Why do we have to go through so much suffering?

I told him there is a simple answer. Because Adam and Eve screwed up and ate the fruit of the tree and disobeyed. Now we live in a world that is longing for the sons of God to be revealed, as Paul said here. I said, "But maybe the Lord is trying to tell you to quit looking at yourself and start looking at and focusing more on him because you just can't handle this all by yourself. It's obvious. You can't handle it." This guy is 6'5" and 275 lbs. He is a big boy. It was interesting to talk to him. As we were talking about some of this, I could see tears start to come down the side of his face as we were talking about it.

It's just sad that there are so many people that don't know what you and I know, what you and I rejoice in, what you and I know to be true. But we have to remind each other of this. We have to tell other people this... that God has defeated death. Christ conquered death. He conquered it by taking away our sins. He conquered it by taking our place, by living, by dying, by rising again. He conquered it by opening to us a paradise that is what God's plan has been for us from the start, but mankind messed up. And along the way, you and I are very, very inclined to focus only on the here and now and forget about the forever. We don't like to think about that side of the church all that much, do we? We don't like to think that we're going to end up in the ground some day unless Christ comes back first. But that's the truth.

So sometimes I'm convinced God lets suffering into my life and into your life and into my friend in South Dakota's life simply because he knows that we need to be focused on him, because otherwise we're going to be focused only on ourselves. And if we continue to live according to the flesh, as Paul said to the Romans here, if the Spirit is in you and you start living again just by the flesh and not by the Spirit who lives in you, you will die. He's not talking about being put in the ground there. He's talking about going to hell.

Sometimes I'm firmly convinced that God, who is infinitely smarter than we are, knows that we need suffering so that we look away from ourselves and we look to him. Then we look to him and we see what he has won for us. We see this paradise that never ends, that has no more suffering, that has no more sorrow, that has no more tears, and we realize (hopefully) that this life is just an instant compared to eternity. That's why our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the perfection that awaits us, because what awaits us is an eternity. And I can't wrap my head around the idea of eternity yet.

I'm used to time. You're used to time. You watch kids go from this to this, right? You watch your back go from straight to hunched, right? This is how it goes. When we get to heaven, there is none of that anymore. I can't wrap my head around that. But that's what my God promises me. That's what your God promises you. That's why we need to always be reminded to keep our focus on him.

He talks in here about "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." Sometimes we need to keep going back and back and back to the Spirit who gives us that testimony. There are many times we don't feel like God's children because of the suffering we are going through. We need to go back to the Spirit's testimony that we are his children. That testimony is found in Scripture where God tells us what he has done to make us his children, how he does it all, how he gives the gift of faith, how he pays for our sins. You and I say we know that, but we need to hear that over and over and over again because that's what leads us to cry out "*Abba, Father.*"

That testimony, that truth that is in Word and Sacrament, doesn't matter what we feel about it at times or when we feel crushed by the suffering we are going through. This is an objective truth that exists outside of us. God has made you his child. He has done it all. Is he who has done it all now just torturing you or letting you twist in the wind? No. He isn't going to do that if he's gone through all this trouble to make you his child. You can cry out "*Abba, Father*" with confidence because you know that he has loved you because he testifies to it again and again and again because he knows we need to hear it again and again and again.

We struggle. We twist and we turn. We suffer. But through it all, we keep our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, for the glory set before him for enduring the cross and adorning a chain so that you and I can spend eternity in this island paradise. The good news is that for this kind of vacation, you don't have to pack. He just takes you. You don't have to pack back up and come back here. He's going to keep you there when he calls you. That's the glorious truth that we have on this island that our Savior has prepared for us. Amen.