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St. Stephen/Our Saviour  
January 7, 2024  
Baptism of our Lord

Sisters and brothers in Christ, let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

So, sisters and brothers in Christ, if I were to ask you, if you have a most favorite quote, what would you say?

I mean, if you had to name one quote that stands above every other quote, what would that quote be for you?

Of all the words and phrases that have ever been spoken or written in all the world, what quote has had the most meaning, has had the most influence upon your life?

PAUSE

Now, I have to say, I have loved a lot of quotes throughout my life.

I love, for instance, the quote from Woody Allen that says, "90% of life is just showing up."

So, if you just show up where you are expected to be...

If you just show up when you are expected...

Then already you have earned an "A."

90% of life is just showing up. People tend to give a lot of leniency, a lot of forgiveness as long as we show up.

PAUSE

And then there is another quote, another phrase that I love in Latin: *Solvitur ambulando*. *Solvitur ambulando*.

It is a phrase that means "It is solved by walking." *Solvitur ambulando*.

You see, the ancient Romans believed that most problems could be solved by going for a walk.

If one had a small problem, one might need only go for a short walk to think about the problem and to work through the problem.

If one had a larger problem, well, that might require a longer walk.

These are just two of the quotes I have loved in life.

*Solvitur ambulando.*

And 90% of life is just showing up.

But if you were to ask me to name my MOST favorite quote, I would have to quote Martin Luther.

And Luther had a lot of great quotes. The man was a certified wordsmith who could craft a wonderful image in words to explain an important point.

Luther, for instance, once said, "You cannot keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair."

In other words, sin and the Devil are all around us, tempting us, like so many birds that fly around, but we don't have to put ourselves in situations where sin and the Devil can get the better of us.

If chocolate for instance if your guilty pleasure, then maybe working in a candy store isn't the best idea.

In other words, know what your weaknesses are, and avoid those places where you are tempted.

"You cannot keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair."

Or how about this one from Luther.

Luther said, "If God told me to eat dung off the streets, not only would I eat it, I would know it was good for me."

Now, Luther probably used the more offensive word for dung, as Luther was not one to hold back with his choice of words.

"If God told me to eat ---- off the streets, not only would I eat it, I would know it was good for me."

Luther's point is that we can trust God's word and know that God's word is for our benefit.

Yes, Luther had a lot of interesting sayings, but my favorite, and this is my most favorite of all quotes...

Of all the words that have ever been spoken this I hold as being the most meaningful and most influential for me.

And it is this.

Luther said, "This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health, but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it, the process is not yet finished, but it is going on, this is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified."

This life is not righteous, but growth in righteousness.

Not health, but healing.

Not being, but becoming.

Not rest, but exercise.

Life is a process. Life is a road.

We are moving toward what we shall be.

PAUSE

And, why? Why do I consider this quote to be most important?

Because, as this quote states, the Christian sees life from a completely different perspective from that of the world.

The world sees this life as starting with birth into this world, and hopefully at birth, one experiences good health and well-being.

And hopefully, we experience childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood in continued good health and well-being.

But as we age, we start to experience changes in our body, and perhaps changes in our mental health.

We experience aches and pains. We are not able to do the same things as when we were young.

And as we age, we tend unfortunately to experience illness, and eventually we all experience death.

That is the general progression of life, at least as the world sees the progression of life.

But, Luther gave us an entirely different way of understanding the progression of life.

Luther saw the progression of life as beginning at baptism.

And at baptism, we die...we die to the powers of sin and death.

Life begins with our death in the waters of baptism.

And life then is a process of healing.

We progress through life, and we are to understand that progression through life as experiencing greater and greater spiritual healing.

Even as our bodies may be slowing down and declining, we are in the process of ever greater healing in our spiritual selves.

Such that, come time of our physical death, we experience the ultimate healing in God.

Death then is simply the crossing over from this life to a life with God.

Again, Luther said, ““This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health, but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it, the process is not yet finished, but it is going on, this is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.”

And this alternative perspective of life is a most radical thought.

This unconventional way of looking at life is truly profound and transformative, in terms of how we should see ourselves moving through life.

PAUSE

Today, on this festival day when we acknowledge the Baptism of our Lord, today it is customary for us to think about our own baptism as well.

Now, not many of us probably could name the date of our baptism.

I know I always have to look it up to remind myself of my date of baptism.

June 1, 1972.

But, when we recall to mind our baptism date...

When we think of the date when we had water poured upon our foreheads, and we received the words from a pastor, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit..."

When we remember our baptism, we are reminded that new life, everlasting life, life eternal began on that day...

Eternity doesn't begin at the end of our earthly existence, but eternity does still begin at death.

Eternity doesn't begin at the end of our earthly existence, but eternity does still begin at death.

For our baptism date is our Happy Death Day.

And I don't mean that in some sick, deranged, macabre kind of way.

I simply mean that our baptism is our Happy Death Day, because again in baptism we die to the powers of sin and death that held sway over us.

And from that date of our baptism we have begun that process of ever greater healing.

PAUSE

And it is right about now that you are sitting there, thinking, "So what?"

So what if we look at life from this alternative perspective?

What purpose does it serve? What impact does it have?

PAUSE

Well, first and foremost, seeing Death as already having happened removes the specter of Death from life.

It removes the fear of Death from life.

PAUSE

I had a friend back in a high school that use to say, "We are all dead, it just hasn't happened yet." Think about that.

"We are already dead, it just hasn't happened yet." That was his understanding of life.

And I used to think about how depressing that is. And it is depressing, that the shadow of Death is forever hovering over us in life.

But Luther said, "That is not the case. The Christian has already died to sin and Death."

Our baptism is the constant reminder that we now live, even now, in eternal life.

So opposed to living with Death as always on the horizon, as coming ever closer to us in life...

As opposed to living with Death on the horizon, we Christians see Death in the rearview mirror.

So it is not that we are all dead, and it just hasn't happened yet.

No, we are all dead; it has already happened. Our baptism is our Happy Death Day! And now, on the other side of Death, we live a new life into eternity.

And fear, that great obstacle to much of what we face in life...fear is null and void.

Yes, for the baptized Christian, life is to be lived in boldness for the sake of gospel.

Life is to be lived with courage for the sake of the gospel.

Live life with courage every day of this New Year and every day of the rest of your life, because the enemy Death is nothing, and so the FEAR of Death is nought.

And secondly, this favorite quote from Martin Luther...

That this life is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness...

Not health, but healing...Not being, but becoming...Not rest, but exercise...

Life is a process. Life is a road.

Yes, this quote secondly reminds us that the compass of all life is restoration. Life is all about mending. Life is about healing.

This is what our baptized Christian lives are to be about.

As we have been healed in baptism, so we are to be about healing in the world.

We are to be agents of healing.

Or, as Paul says, we are ambassadors of reconciliation.

Reconciliation being just a very, big, fancy word for healing.

PAUSE

So, Sisters and Brothers in Christ, there you have it.

There is my favorite quote, and WHY I love this quote.

And our baptized Christian lives are meant to embody this quote.

We are growing in righteousness.

We are becoming. We are healing. We are exercising.

We are in process. We are on the road.

And Death is behind us. We need not fear anything.

But we do have work to do, in the form of reconciliation and healing. So let's get to it.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.