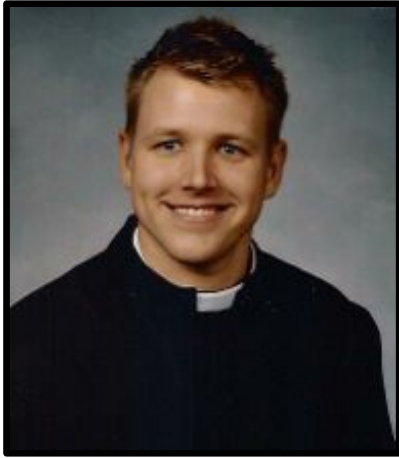

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From Pastor's Desk

The Seven Most Popular Myths about Death: Why Easter Matters

by Rev. Jared Melius

1. Death is natural.

A recent PBS publication aimed at helping little children cope with death and dying noted: "Death happens to all living things, from blades of grass to frogs, dogs, and people. Whether it's unexpected or a long time coming, happening when someone or something is young or old, death is part of what it means to live." The message? Death is a good thing. How sad! The best advice our unbelieving culture can offer about death is to accept it and make the best of things before you die.

If PBS is right, if death is just a natural part of life, then why is it so terrifying? Why do we pay enormous sums of cash in medical treatments and gym memberships to forestall it? Why does it cause such agonizing grief? Because death is not natural. Humans have an inborn sense that we are not born simply to die.

What humans may not know is the reason that we die. Death is our enemy (1 Cor. 15:26), brought on by human sin (Rom. 6:23), and defeated by Jesus on the cross.

Death is not natural. It is not good. It is impossible to die with dignity. Rather, Easter tells us that death has been disarmed and defeated by Christ. His resurrection, not the well-meaning myths of our culture, is our comfort in death.

2. A Christian will have to answer for his sins when he dies.

This misconception probably arises from Roman Catholic doctrine. According to the Catholic Church, every person in the world will undergo a judgment immediately after he or she dies to determine if his or her life merits entrance into heaven, hell, or purgatory. This Catholic conception has spawned the imagery of St. Peter, old and bearded, sitting at the pearly gates acting as the heavenly doorman (or bouncer, as the case may require).

The imagery is not without a grain of truth. The Bible teaches that everyone will die and immediately be judged (Hebrews 9:27, Romans 14:12, 2 Corinthians 5:9, 10). However, for Christians, this

judgment is nothing like the heavenly interrogation room of popular lore. After all, those incorporated into Christ escape judgment according to the Law (Romans 8:1, 31-34, John 5:24). Christians will not have to answer for their sins, because Jesus has already answered for them on the cross. Easter proves it. The resurrection of Jesus is the Father's declaration that the sins of the whole world are paid in full by Jesus. If we still had to answer for our sins and convince God to let us into Heaven, that would mean Jesus failed. But He has not failed. Easter proves it. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." Psalm 103:12-3.

3. When you die, you become an angel.

You've heard this sentiment before, haven't you? "God needed one more angel in His choir." "She has her wings now." "Grandma is watching over us." Simply put, this is a myth. Jesus was incarnate as a man, not an angel. He died in His body and His soul as a man,

not an angel. He rose on Easter and showed Thomas His human hands and side. Jesus did not save us to be glorified as angels; He saved us to give us glorified bodies like unto His own (Philippians 3:21, Romans 6:5, 8). The same distinction between men and angels now will continue in heaven.

4. When you die, you'll finally be through with the body.

The older we get, the more and more our bodies hurt and fail. In time, even Christians long for the day that they won't have painful knees, ailing lungs or failing hearts. We are tempted to be free of the body. Popular myth postulates that, in Heaven, we will be free of it.

But, according to the Scriptures, the problem is not with the body, but rather with the sin which has corrupted both body and soul. It is sin, not biology or evolution, which causes all manner of bodily pain, cancer, heart failure and sore backs. On Easter evening, when Jesus, appeared to His disciples, all the bodily indications of His crucifixion were canceled. His body was perfected; it no longer bore the corruption of a thorny crown or a flogged back. Signs remained in His hands and side, but only to testify that He is the Savior who died, but who is now alive. So also, on the final day, the bodies of Christians, no longer marred by sin, will be perfected. (Philippians 3:21, 1 Corinthians 15:20-22, John 5:28, 29) Our legs will be strong, our eyes and ears perfect, and our brains will be sharp.

And yet, despite its regular repetition in the Creed, "the resurrection of the body" is taught infrequently, even in the church. Many well-meaning pastors

preach their funeral sermons and give the impression that the diseased in Christ already enjoys their full resurrection reward. No, not yet. When a Christian dies, their soul ascends to paradise, while their body "sleeps" and awaits the final day of Christ's coming. Of course, it is true that, as Paul says, it is much better to be in Paradise with the Lord, free from his sin afflicted body, than to remain in the body (2 Corinthians 5:8, Philippians 1:23), but the Bible repeatedly turns our gaze toward that final glorious day when we will together with body and soul and be re-united and ushered into the heavenly Jerusalem. (Colossians 3:4, Titus 2:13)

Also, it's wrong to make a remark like this: "After I die, I don't care

...it is much better to be in Paradise with the Lord, free from his sin afflicted body, than to remain in the body...

what you do with my body. Put it in an old crate and toss it into the lake, for all I care. I'll be in Heaven." The sentiment is understandable, but not Christian. God created that body, and God still has glorious plans for it. Luther once remarked, "The fathers decorated sepulchers magnificently. They did not throw away the dead like bodies of beasts, but they set up memorials of them for a perpetual reminder so that they might be testimonies of the future resurrection, which they believed and expected." So, it is good that we should also take care and treasure the bodies of dear Christian loved ones.

5. Funerals are for the living, not the dead.

This is only partially true. The chief function of a funeral is to properly care for the body of a Christian after death. Caring for the body of a beloved Christian proclaims the resurrection of the dead, even as it proclaims the resurrection of Christ Jesus on Easter.

As a pastor, the care of the body is my chief responsibility. At funerals, you'll find me standing aside the casket, keeping watch. At the cemetery, I am rarely far from the casket, walking right beside or in front of it. Often, I am the last to leave the casket at graveside. I am caring for the body. This is what Christians do for their own after death. It is no wonder that you feel a responsibility to visit the grave of your loved ones. Have you found yourself taking care of the headstone, cleaning it off, picking some weeds, laying flowers down? That is because you want to care for the body. It is good. You should not be ashamed.

Of course, the funeral is also a comfort for the hurting family and friends of the loved ones. The readings, prayers and sermon are a reminder of Jesus Christ's work and salvation. They are important, but they are not the only reason - not even the chief reason - we have funerals.

But the myth persists. And, it is powerful. A funeral home director once noted: "The funeral is for the living. It should meet the needs of the family and give them a chance to honor and commemorate the dead." Not so. The Christian burial is different. The family is important, but caring for the dead and confessing Christ is more important still. Oftentimes, families who think that the funeral is only for the living demand to include secular songs or secular

ceremonies or they wish to speak a "eulogy" apart from the sermon. Whatever helps them come to terms with their loss or "honor" their loved one appears to be fair game. But the funeral is not chiefly the occasion to serve the living, but, rather, the dead in Christ.

6. The soul sleeps.

When Jesus hung on the cross, one of His seven precious words was spoken right before He died: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Jesus' body was laid into a tomb to await Easter morning, but His spirit was not in that tomb. After all, the Bible's definition of death is the separation of the body from one's soul or spirit. (Ecclesiastes 12:7, 2 Corinthians 5:8, Acts 7:59) On Easter morning, Jesus showed Himself alive, His soul obviously having been re-united with His body. So, where was the soul of Jesus on the [Saturday](#) that His body was in the tomb? It was in precisely the same place that the Bible teaches all the souls of Christians are when they die: committed to the Father's hands.

There is an intermediate state between the death of the Christian and the final resurrection of the dead. However, the details concerning that state are not as clear in the Scriptures, and thus, they are the subject of some debate. Some in the history of the church have contended that the soul merely sleeps peacefully and unconsciously until the resurrection. This view is commonly called "soul sleep," a view maintaining that the Christian does not enjoy a reward when he dies, but must wait until the resurrection. This is a myth,

but a myth which mistakenly borrows from biblical language. Frequently, the Bible refers to the death of Christians as "sleeping." (Matthew 9:24, John 11:11, Acts 7:60) This, however, is only a reference to the state of the body, not the soul. The soul is in Paradise with Jesus. (Luke 23:43)

7. The funeral of a Christian is a celebration.

Have you heard this recently? It started amongst pagans and unbelievers. They did not really understand the need for a funeral in a church so instead of mourning the loss of their loved ones, they threw parties in

their honor instead. They didn't want a funeral; they wanted a celebration of life! Away with the flowers and cards. Bring in the balloons and beer.

This may be fine for an evolutionary and atheistic culture that recognizes no life after death and whitewashes over the devastation of death as no more significant than a piece of organic matter being absorbed back into the ground. But, I've noticed recently that this language has even come in to the church. Of all the times a person ought to be allowed to be sad, shouldn't a funeral be it? Don't we spend enough of our energy in this life masking over reality, smiling and saying "good" when people ask how we are doing? But a funeral?

Our Lord gives permission to mourn when someone dies. He said to His disciples on the night of His betrayal, "I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy." (John 16:20) Of, we do not grieve like the world,

which has no hope in the resurrection. If we are sad, if we cry, we are not crying for the Christian safe in Paradise. They are not sad and they lack nothing. For that, we should rejoice, and, perhaps even celebrate. However, we are sad and we cry because they are no longer with us. We don't get to have them any longer. "There is a time for everything...a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance." (Eccl. 3:4) If ever there was a time when it is okay to weep and mourn, it is the funeral.

I am saying this because I am afraid many Christians feel that if they are overwhelmingly sad at the loss of a loved one, their faith must be weak. No. Our Lord Jesus Himself cried at the loss of His dear friend Lazarus. Do not be ashamed. The Lord will wipe away all your tears in Heaven, but that does not mean that He has wiped them away now. For now, we walk in a vale of tears. The Lord is risen and that gives great and permanent joy, even in the midst of sadness, but it does not remove sadness. And let us remember this much, if death is the occasion for a celebration, why has Our Lord gone to such lengths to destroy death? Why would Easter give such comfort if death were nothing more than an occasion for a party? Death is hard. It should be. But, thanks be to God, Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Him, though he die, yet shall He live (John 11:25).

Rev. Jared Melius is pastor of Mount Zion Lutheran Church, Denver, CO and a classmate from the seminary.

The Blood of Jesus: The Book of Hebrews in Lent

Refreshments served after Lenten services.

Wednesday, April 6, 7:00 pm
Speaking Blood (Hebrews 12:22–24)

Wednesday, April 13th, 7:00 pm
Holy Blood (Hebrews 13:9–16)

Maundy Thursday, April 21, 7:00 pm
Divine Service with Holy Communion

Good Friday, April 22, 7:00 pm
Divine Service with Holy Communion

Easter Vigil, April 23, 5:30 pm
Divine Service with Holy Communion

Easter Sunrise, April 24, 6:00 am
Divine Service with Holy Communion

Easter Day, April 24, 9:00 am
Divine Service with Holy Communion

We will be hosting... an Easter Breakfast Fundraiser for Joel Hilgendorf between the Easter Sunrise Divine Service and the 9:00 a.m. Divine Service. Breakfast is for anyone attending either or both Easter services and will be served from 7:00 a.m. until 8:30 a.m.

We are collecting free-will donations at the breakfast to help defray the costs for Joel's immediate family to visit him while he's at U of I Medical Center, Chicago, Illinois. He's been there since March 1 and is expected to be there for at least another five weeks. Every dollar given will be matched with a dollar from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans up to \$1200.

Volunteers are needed. Please sign up to bring needed items by signing up on the sheets at the back of the Narthex or by contacting Lauren Braaten [\(260\) 438-0331](tel:2604380331) or laurenbraaten@gmail.com.

Easter Egg Hunt. . .will be after the 9:00 a.m. Divine Service on Easter Day, April 24, 2011.

GREETERS LIST

- Apr 3 Becky Kappes – West
 Tim & Tresa Pollock – East
- Apr 10 Harold & Irene Wattjes – West
 Donna & Gunnar Campbell – East
- Apr 17 Jim Dyer – West
 Joan Vukelich – East
- Apr 24 Ruth Sims – West
 Laverl Byers – East
- May 3 Becky Kappes – West
 Tim & Tresa Pollock – East
- May 10 Harold & Irene Wattjes – West
 Donna & Gunnar Campbell – East
- May 17 Jim Dyer – West
 Joan Vukelich – East
- May 24 Ruth Sims – West
 Laverl Byers - East

GREETERS NEEDED

ATTENDANCE		OFFERINGS		
Saturday	Sunday	General	Missions	Building
2/5 11	2/6 64	1985.00	55.00	175.00
2/12 20	2/13 80	2812.78		20.00
2/19 13	2/20 69	1602.27		20.00
2/26	2/27			
TOTALS 44	213			
Average	86	6400.05	55.00	215.00

COFFEE COMMITTEE

- Apr Ann Carroll
- May Arleigh Jones
- Jun Ruth Sims
- Jul Harold & Irene Wattjes
- Aug Pastor & Lauren Braaten
- Sep Laverl Byers
- Oct Harold & Irene Wattjes
- Nov Jerry & Joyce Alexander
- Dec Pastor & Lauren Braaten

ALTAR COMMITTEE

- Apr Ruth Bretz, Marylin Joergens ,
 Carol Munson & Sue Danielson
- May Joan Vukelich & Theresa Fields
- Jun Holly Wikoff and Sharon Allen
- Jul Delores Ford & Becky Kappes
- Aug Janice Arthur & Janet Stumeier
- Sep Wanda Long & Irene Wattjes
- Oct Theresa Fields & Sharon Allen
- Nov Ann Hilgendorf & Carol Munson
- Dec Ann Carroll, Holly Wikoff, Sherrie
 Hoel & Tonia Timlin

IN THE NEWS

1. ScienceNOW: “[Long-Neglected Experiment Gives New Clues to Origin of Life](#)”

Believe it or not, the famous [Miller-Urey experiment](#) of the 1950s is still making headlines in the creation–evolution controversy.

In the biochemistry experiment, which took place more than half a century ago at the University of Chicago, graduate student Stanley Miller, adviser Harold Urey, and others ran an electric charge through a mixture of gaseous elements thought to replicate the early earth’s atmosphere. The apparatus eventually produced a small portion of simple amino acids along with carcinogenic tar.

The results may seem underwhelming, but it’s the closest evolutionists have come to demonstrating how even the simplest life-forms could have originated from inanimate matter. For that reason, evolutionary researchers have remained enamored with the prospect of producing life from non-life in the lab – although they’ve since changed their minds about the composition of the early earth’s atmosphere.

In [October 2008](#) we discussed the research of University of California–San Diego biochemist Jeffrey Bada, a former student of the late Miller, who inherited several boxes full of vials from Miller’s experiments. Bada and a team of researchers are continuing to [report](#) their analyses of what is inside the decades-old vials – the “dried sludge” that is all that remains of a series of experiments like the one that made Miller famous. (For whatever reason, Miller saved the vials but apparently never analyzed their contents.)

The team found twenty-three amino acids inside the latest set of vials, including six amino acids that contain sulfur. Several sulfur-based amino acids play a prominent role in life, so the finding has excited

evolutionists who are still eking hope out of the half-century-old experiments.

What the evolutionists can’t be excited about are the lingering problems with the experiments. For one thing, as we mentioned above, evolutionists disagree about the composition of the early earth’s atmosphere. The scientists believe Miller’s use of hydrogen sulfide in the experiment was pivotal in allowing sulfur-based amino acids to form, but debate lingers over where life on earth could have (supposedly) appeared and whether sufficient hydrogen sulfide would have been present. (Of course, a truly committed evolutionist will point out that simply because life exists, we have sufficient proof that it must have evolved, *somehow!*)

The team also notes that the experiments produced an equal amount of “left-handed” and “right-handed” amino acids. Although this is taken as evidence that microorganisms did not contaminate the vials, it is also a major obstacle to the idea that life originated through inanimate processes because of the so-called “[chirality problem](#).”

As we’ve written before, there is still a much bigger element of magic than science in evolutionary origin-of-life models. The origin of simple organic molecules is a far cry – and a number of highly unlikely steps – away from even the simplest self-reproducing life-forms powered by RNA. In fact, if anything, the Miller-Urey experiments are a reminder that the organic molecules produced through even carefully controlled laboratory processes are nothing like life.

Beloved Synod, Take Courage!



There is unfolding before us a moment of opportunity for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod like nothing ever before in our history. We have a worldwide vocation, a world that is calling us to account, to stand and be counted for Christ. Despite all our weaknesses, we have unbelievable worldwide capacity for the advancement of the Gospel and the Lutheran Confession. It's a moment for courage. Shall we dare, by faith in Christ, to seize the moment?

We are beset by deep challenges on every front. The financial struggles of our nation pinch our schools and churches, as well as our district and national work. The world presses us hard as much of western Christianity settles gradually into a more biblical, albeit minority, status (Matt. 7:13–14). Our strength seems to pale in the face of a virulent Islam, an aggressive and ubiquitous Mormonism or the barrage of secular garbage

delivered by the media 24/7 right into our homes. Christian courage is in short supply. Where shall we find the fortitude to go on the offensive in these last and wretched days?

Circa 800 B.C., Elisha the prophet unveiled, to a cowering army of the Lord, its hidden but real strength.

When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" He said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:15ff.).

And so it is with us. Lord, open our eyes! As with the cross itself, the countenance of the Church in this world is always weakness. The Church is always hidden under affliction, beset with challenges, struggling with divisions. It is always apparently outnumbered in battle. It has never been otherwise. This truth is portrayed on almost every page of the Bible. And yet, "On this rock build my Church, and the gates of (Matt. 16:18).

Luther taught that because of our reckoning us righteous on account Christian life with a "joyful daring,"

are three things that produce courage in the Christian:

Repentance. Confessing our sins daily, we have a clear conscience. We're not paralyzed by guilt or anger or regret. We are forgiven and freed to act (1 Peter 3:21; Acts 23:1).

1. **We have a clear Word of God.** The Bible is a clear book. It is God's own Word, and we have in the Sacred Scriptures everything we need for faith and life. There is no need to wallow in indecision. We can act with divinely wrought confidence (Dan. 10:19; Rom. 15:4)!
2. **Vocation.** The Lord calls us into His Church to live our lives where He has placed us individually (Rom. 1:6; 1 Cor. 7:20). Our service to Jesus does not entail running away from the people in our family, community or church. We are called to evangelize and love precisely *them!*

And the Missouri Synod, therefore, has a collective vocation. Our ecumenical task is to hold forth worldwide for orthodox, biblical Christianity—for the singular authority of Holy Scripture; for the singular truth that salvation is completely by grace (a gift!) on account of Christ's meritorious life, death and resurrection for us; for the singular truth that this gift is grabbed hold of solely by faith, which is itself worked completely by God through His Word.

Finally, we have a vocation to strengthen worldwide Lutheranism in its witness to Christ for the salvation of souls. This is a moment like never before. The sexuality decisions of the ELCA and European Lutherans, the shrinking world linked by travel and instant communication—all are sending worldwide Lutheranism to our door. And much of Lutheranism wants precisely what the LCMS has: the solid confession of Christ in the midst of a world of sweeping uncertainty.

Take courage! Let's go on the offensive! "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

"O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see."

[Peter's confession of Christ] I will hell shall not prevail against it"

certainty of forgiveness and God's of Jesus, we are free to live this a joyful courage! Luther said there

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