

## **“Let Christ’s Victory Be Your Victory”**

### **Luke 24:1-12**

Back in the 1990’s during one of our vacation trips to Florida, Danette and I, out of curiosity, decided to drive through “The Villages”, a new retirement community. It started as a mobile home park in the 1970’s called Orange Blossom Gardens. The founder and owner, Harold Schwartz, started adding amenities like shops, banks, and golf courses and people began to build retirement homes. In 1992, the name was changed to “The Villages” and it grew quickly.

The community has rules that govern many aspects of life there, including how long children can visit and how many pet fish residents can keep.

The Villages is known for its golfcarts, which residents use for transportation and to play golf on the community’s many golf courses. Apparently, there are other attractions that I choose not to talk about.

Harold Schwartz, the developer, understood that the United States was ready to imagine a whole new stage of life – “the golden years” as marketers proclaimed them.

Retirement communities like The Villages and Sun City in Arizona are the result of cultural revolution in full swing. In the second half of the last century, Social Security and private pensions liberated tens of millions of older Americans from poverty and dependency. Modern medicine had given them the health to enjoy what was then a new lifestyle – leisure.

In 1965, Medicare eliminated the old age fear of medical bankruptcy.

In 1972, President Richard Nixon and the democratic congress, outbidding each other for the senior vote, increased Social Security by 20% and indexed it to keep up with inflation. With

these two programs on autopilot, the entitlement state was born, and the elderly were its prime beneficiaries.

When we drove through The Villages, we were seeing the embodiment of our government's greatest 20<sup>th</sup> century domestic achievement – the near elimination of destitution among the elderly. The poverty rate among those sixty-five and older had fallen from 30% in 1965 to 10% in 2022 according to the Census Bureau.

Today's conception of old age and retirement are modern inventions. When my ancestors came from Germany in the 1830's, "old age" was not a long phase of life that began at 65, but a short one that was marked by illness and death. In the mid-1800's, the average 30-year-old could expect to live about 30 more years. If we go back even further, the average life span during the Bronze Age was eighteen, in the Roman Empire – 22, and in 1776 in Massachusetts, the average life span was 36. Today in the U.S., according to the National Center for Health Statistics, the average life span is 77.5 years. Those averages include child mortality, which partly accounts for shorter lifespans in earlier epochs.

So, what do we know about this longer life stage that begins at 65? Evidence shows that most of what people think they know about life after 65 is wrong. It is not a process of uniform decline. It brings gains too – greater equanimity, more emotional resilience, and a heightened appreciation of life's blessings.

Older people can learn and create. Emotional development and maturation continue right through the end of life. And aging can bring wisdom – the ability to rise above a self-centered viewpoint, master turbulent emotions, and solve life's problems – a boon not only to the wise but to everyone around them.

Late adulthood is a time when prospects for earning diminish but the potential for grandparenting, mentoring, and volunteering peaks. It can be a time when personal ambition yields to building community and nurturing relationships. We can give back to our communities, our families, and our God. Right now, Americans are receiving more than a decade of additional time that is potentially the greatest gift any generation of humans has ever received. The question is whether we will waste it or grasp it, keep moving, and love the Lord our God and our neighbors as ourselves. Keep moving, no matter how old we are, as we remember why we are celebrating what happened on that first Easter day.

Jesus died the ugliest of deaths two nights ago, on a cross. In the minds of his male followers, his disciples, he is dead and gone. They hide in Jerusalem fearing the religious authorities may be searching for them. As Sunday morning approaches, they dare not step outside into the sunlight.

But there were other disciples, more courageous and more feeling. A group of these stronger followers of Jesus gathered together as the sun began to peak over the horizon. Their arms were filled with bottles of spices and ointments as they began their hike to the tomb of their friend. Now these disciples could finally be alone with Jesus as they rubbed the spices and ointments over his body, embalming him as their last act of love.

As these disciples neared the tomb, they wondered how they would get past the huge stone that sealed the entrance. They did not know, but their faith pushed them on along the path. Suddenly, there it was, the rock in which Jesus lay wrapped in a linen shroud. And as they came closer, they found the stone rolled away from the tomb.

Their faith had pushed them this far, and now they did not hesitate to enter the tomb. They would get to anoint Jesus's body after all, and they were excited. The disciples entered the darkness of the rock, and their eyes were momentarily blinded. As their pupils adjusted, they still could not see the body they came to anoint, and they became perplexed about this. How did this stone get rolled to the side? What happened to the body wrapped in linen? Perplexed.

Suddenly, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel; and as they were frightened and bowed their face to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise."

Flashback. These words of these two angels in the tomb instantly bring images flashing through the minds of the disciples. They visualize the hillside back in Galilee, Jesus miraculously feeding the 5,000, and then with full bellies sitting down together and Jesus saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised". They had not understood. We had not understood.

Now these stronger disciples remember his words, now they understand. They run from the tomb to share this good news with the eleven in hiding and all the rest of Jesus' followers.

Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and other women who had been in the empty tomb, had listened to words of the angels, and who now hurried to the upper room to tell all of this to the eleven.

These women banged on that wooden door and the disciples reluctantly let them in. As the women rushed into the room, the eleven listened to their frenzied story. A bunch of women

who are in mourning, who are beside themselves with grief, are seeing and hearing things. The words of these women seemed to the eleven an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

The eleven would not believe the women's story, called it an idle tale, in part because the messengers were women. It is possible, given the earthshaking nature of their news, that the women were somewhat excited, perhaps tripping over one another's words in an attempt to tell their fantastic story. And besides, what could women, (the oppressed of Jewish society), know about such things?

Yet it was to these modest, unassuming women that angels spoke, and the risen Lord revealed himself. They became the bearers of the greatest and single most important message in history; "Christ is Risen!"

Are these words of an idle tale or the words of victory? Is there death or is there life? Do we listen to the words of the women, or do we continue to ignore them as we huddle together in fear? That choice is yours. As for me and my house, we listen to the women, and we celebrate on this day a great victory. Today we express our joy over the victory of Christ, and we participate in his victory every Sunday morning throughout the year.

The show is not over. Your resurrection day and my resurrection day is yet to come. Will you be in the tomb looking for Jesus and speaking with angels or will you be cocooning in fear behind closed door? As we come forward to share the body and blood of the resurrected Christ let each of us recommit ourselves to being active followers of Christ and not waste this next year cocooning and only responding to our own needs.

The victory over death is won for all of us who believe. Let Christ's victory be our victory.

May the peace of God . . .

#389 – Christ is Alive! Let Christians Sing