

WD May 10, 2021
Pastor Matthew Woods

“Luther’s Light Sleeper”

Hard Work and a Deep Sleep

Have you ever taken a nap that you couldn’t wake yourself up from? Friday, Tricia and I planted eight large trees. Each tree needed a huge hole. However, the ground was clumpy with clay. Not only did we have to dig each hole by hand but before each clump of clay could be thrown back in around the tree it had to be chopped up so that it didn’t create air pockets. My shoulders are still aching.

Somehow, we also had a squirrel get into the house recently through a vent. The dumb thing made a mess. That meant having to open up the drywall in the bathroom ceiling. We only finished the room a couple of years ago. But we had to get into the ceiling to repair the damage done by the squirrel.

So, it all finally came to a head on Saturday afternoon. I sat down on the couch for just a minute and the next thing I know I was out; not just out but in a deep, sound asleep. I heard the dog bark, and the TV running but it was like I couldn’t break out of my slumber. It was one of those naps that was hard to wake up from. Ever nap like that? Well, Martin Luther in a sermon from 1533 suggests that those who sleep in sleep lighter in death than I did on my couch. Sound’s strange but consider his logic.

The Raising of the Widow’s Son at Nain

Consider the text that he reads from in Luke 7:11-17. ¹¹ Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. ¹² As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. ¹³ When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.”

¹⁴ Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” ¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

¹⁶ They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” ¹⁷ This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

Luther-For Those in Christ Death is a Light Sleep

Luther makes the point that before the Lord Jesus, death is not death but a sleep. He says, “With all hope gone, and everyone disheartened by the death of son, our dear Lord comes, without healing medicines, and speaks merely a word. ‘Young man, I say to you Arise!’ At once the dead man arises and is alive...though we die, with him we are not dead. The boy’s death is gone, and life has returned. It is just as Christ states in the Gospel: ‘God is not the God of the dead but of the living.’”

“That is what should learn from today’s Gospel lesson, namely, the great power of God will exert it’s power upon us through Christ on Judgement Day, when with one word he will call forth from the dead all people and bless the believers eternally.... The widows son is dead, with all senses and hearing stopped; but as soon as Christ speaks to him, he hears. The one who does not hear, hears; the one who does not live, lives. And yet Christ does nothing more than open his mouth and tell him to arise. That one word is so powerful that death must yield, and life again returns.”

And here is the encouraging point from Luther. “We are to understand that Christ is saying to us, I know that you are afraid of death; but you must not be afraid, do not let your heart be troubled; for even though death has terrors for you, what can it do to you?....Jesus says, ‘I can very easily raise you from the dead—as easily as you rouse someone from their sleep—and He desires very much to do so, having both the necessary power and intention....”

“Therefore, those who lie dead and buried in the churchyard and under the ground sleep more lightly than we do in our beds. We know that a person sleeps so soundly that he is called ten times before he ever hears. But the dead hear that one word from Jesus and wake up. The moment he speaks just once, ‘Young man, I say to you get up!’; ‘Lazarus come forth!’; ‘Young Lady, I say to you get up!’. They heard in an instant.... It is true, we sleep much more soundly in bed than we do in the churchyard! Thus, before God, death is not death but a light sleep.”

When Jesus Calls Your Name You Will Wake Up Too

Luther is long on words but his point is worth noting. Jesus refers to death as sleep; rest. As the end of the Easter Season gives way to the Season of Pentecost, I invite you to consider the power of the resurrection one more time.

When our name was called at baptism we were made as children of God according to Galatians 3. The Lord is not going to leave any child behind on the last day. When we hear the Lord call our name in the resurrection His voice will be recognizable and distinct. His voice will be life-giving. Speaking your name will make you alive. Our dead ears will hear and we will come to life again. Someday the Lord will say, “Matt I say to you arise.” And as 1 Corinthians 15 says that in an instant we will be changed in a flash in the twinkling of an eye, no longer mortal but immortal; no longer perishable but imperishable. No longer asleep but awake and rested.

Martin Luther makes a great observation. My nap was deeper than those who rest in Christ. When the Lord calls you by name no one can prevent your resurrection from happening. Nothing can keep you from hearing His voice. Nothing can keep you from waking up to the resurrection. This is the good news that we have been celebrating this Easter season. This in itself should give you peace and calm your fears. This is where we rest our hope, In Jesus.

May the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace in Jesus. Amen.

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John 3:30

