

Pastor T.C. Arnold
6th Sunday after Trinity
1 Corinthians 15:21-22
July 27th, 2014

Lazarus Spengler was the ninth out of twenty-one children born in 1479 to Georg and Agnes in Nuremberg, Germany. He followed in his father's footsteps and became the town clerk in the place where he grew up. By "happenstance" he met Martin Luther in 1518 when Luther passed through Nuremberg. He became an ardent supporter. So much of a supporter of Luther that Spengler was mentioned by Pope Leo X in a papal decree threatening to excommunicate him, Luther and others if they did not submit to the Pope's authority. Luther refused to submit and so did Spengler. They were excommunicated in 1521.

Now, remember, Spengler was a town clerk. He was not a pastor or trained theologian. However, he participated in the theological negotiations at the Diet of Augsburg, he designed the Luther Seal, and is even quoted in the Lutheran Confessions – the Book of Concord. Also, he also wrote several hymns, including our sermon hymn today, "All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall."

How could this ninth kid out of twenty-one turned town clerk, born to a town clerk, become such an important person in the Reformation? How could this man trained in law for a civic position, design a symbol for Luther that is still used world-wide today? And most especially for the sake of the sermon this morning, how could this layperson in the time of the Reformation write such a meaningful and renowned hymn like the one we just sang? Simple. He copied!!!

And that is the most awesome part – for any of us, for that matter!! We have all we need for our words, for our hymns, for our liturgy, for our lives. We have it all, in God's Word. This hymn, written by Spengler, is mostly a paraphrase of a 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, today's sermon text. Spengler says in the hymn (v. 5), "*As by one man all mankind fell and, born in sin, was doomed to hell. So by one man, who took our place, we all were justified by grace.*" Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15, said it this way first: "*For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.*" The greatest hymns speak the Lord's truth, as the Lord spoke it. This hymn written by a town clerk from Nuremberg, Germany may not be your favorite hymn, but it sure is a faithful hymn.

The hymn is a life reminder... so is the text... that we are dead in sins but alive in Christ. We are both dead and alive, and we depend on that "alive in Christ" part for our life today and in heaven to come. That's simple enough. That's faithful enough. Even today's Epistle reading from Romans chapter six says this about you and me. It says that, "*We were buried with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life... Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him... so you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*" Dead and alive, dead and alive. Hymns like our sermon hymn today talk about it, and so does the Word of God time and time again. In Adam – that is, in our humanness we are dead. In Christ we are made alive.

Take a survey of your life right now, the experiences that you have had, the joys and the sorrows. It's true that we have those bad days where it feels like death is all around us. We sorrow over yet another piece of bad news concerning the health of a loved one – or our own health. We feel horrible because of another failed relationship, a terrible week or month on the job, or maybe we are lonely and depressed and having no one to share our troubles and disappointments with. Beloved, it's not uncommon for us Christians to feel as if death is at our doorstep in one way or the other. We could be "close to death" regarding our "lack-of" health. Or, we could even be "close to death" – that feeling of emptiness and loneliness that consumes us. When we are separated from the love of others, that emptiness and loneliness can feel like death.

And so beloved, please keep that in mind when you have the opportunity to speak to or befriend someone who is new. When you have the opportunity to comfort the despondent and console that person who just needs someone to listen to them. Never forget what it means to be a neighbor. In our rig-a-ma-roll life that takes us from one place to the next without any time to even breath in between, don't forget that at times there are those who look to you to stand by them when they are hurting and in need of you. We quickly get turned inward when we get overwhelmed with ball games with the kids, doctor's appointments, running errand after errand, and forget that acting in a "selfless" way toward someone else and putting our own needs aside, might actually bring life out of death for that person.

Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan rides down the road and comes across a man who would have never given him the time of day, would have hated him, laying on the road half-dead. For all intents and purposes, he was dead. He would have died without someone intervening. And the one who comes along is an enemy. Yet, he is the one who has compassion. He is the one who makes the dead alive again. He is the one who takes care of the man who fell into the hands of robbers and would have surely died without a man he despised coming along to save him. This is one of the greatest stories of how the Lord makes those who were "as good as dead" alive again by coming along and healing and binding wounds. Most people think that the parable of the Good Samaritan is about us being the Samaritan and helping our neighbor. Yes, that is a good lesson. We should be like the Samaritan and help our neighbor. Be the Samaritan. But more appropriately, the Good Samaritan is Jesus and we are the man who is nearly dead on the road, the one who despises the Samaritan/Jesus with how we act and what we say. And Jesus is the one who, in our grief, in our pain, in our disease, comes and binds up wounds and pays the price for our continued care and life.

"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive," says 1 Cor. 15. *All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall.* Yet, in Christ all are made alive. Today we still live in "Adam's fall." This is sin. We know this because the faithful suffer. And the Lord's solution to suffering? It's not what we might expect. He came not to bring suffering to an end, but to join us in it. He does not fight suffering with an act of power that keeps us from feeling the effects of sin... we will continue to feel it on this side of eternity... but rather fights suffering with an act of weakness. The Lord's answer to "the fall of Adam" – to sin, to the problem of suffering is the cross. His solution to your suffering is His suffering. His suffering is the way Jesus makes the dead, alive. By His death, Jesus gives the dead life again. And that is good news for you and me – who are dead, but in Christ, alive!!

How do we know this? From the Bible, of course. That is our teaching and that is our preaching. That is where our hymns come from and that is where a town clerk can find the fodder for great hymns. He made nothing up on his own. I make nothing up today in preaching. Sure, the way I put this sermon together today is my own style and work (for better or for worse), but what you hear is from Him. All mankind is fallen in sin. All who believe in Him have eternal life. The Lord comes and binds up the wounds of the weak by becoming "weakness placed on a cross" for us. The Christian life is a death to life kind of life. In Christ, that is the life of the Christian. It's hard, but in Jesus it has its reward. It belongs to you. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.