

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Advent 4
Saturday, December 21, 2024, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, December 22, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.

“What Do You Feel?”

Luke 1:39-45

What do you feel when you hear the Gospel, the Word of God, the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ spoken to you from the Lord? John the Baptist, the unborn baby inside Elizabeth leaped for joy hearing the voice of Mary. He knew that the Christ was in his midst.

What stirs within you when Christ is in your midst? Or do you feel anything at all? One of the truly terrible aspects of a disease like diabetes or leprosy is that parts of your body feel no pain. I think about the vain hope of some in the scientific community who are working to be able to download human consciousness into a computer so you can live forever as a 3D hologram (or until the power goes out). The promise is that you live forever with no pain. It is a terrible thing to feel nothing. To **physically** feel nothing will drive a person insane.

But what about you? When you hear the Word of God; when you hear the promise of the coming of Christ; when you hear the words of the Absolution and all your sin has been forgiven; what do you feel?

It seems to be an odd question from the pulpit given that faith is not an emotion, but it is a question with which I have been wrestling ever since mom had

her stroke. That night in the ER, it had a couple of moments when I welled up with tears and had a hard time getting the words to come out, but I didn't cry. And the fear or sadness I had was not because she might die. She had no pain, she could speak but she wasn't carrying a conversation. Everything was emotionless, matter of fact, yes or no. She thankfully answered many very hard questions from the doctors about the type of care she desired.

My fear and sadness that night was over the prospect of her existing in that numb, emotionless, bedridden state for who knows how long, and, before she answered the hard questions, I thought I was going to have to answer the hard questions. That was my time of greatest emotion that night.

After having a couple of better days with more words than just "yes" or "no," on the morning of the third day, it became clear that our Lord was calling her to be part of the resurrection.

Since that first night, I had not had any heightened moments of sadness – shedding of tears and such. And that caused me to question me. But then the Friday after the Lord had called her home, all the weight of the moment poured out. It was cathartic. It was good. It was needed. We are conditioned to mourn. Even Jesus wept at Lazarus' tomb, and He knew exactly what He was just about to do.

As I look back upon the week between her stroke and her being called to the Church Triumphant, dad summed it up with one word while talking to mom's younger brother – my Uncle Roy. He said, "The week was 'beautiful.'"

And that is the way in which I have described it to many people. The week was beautiful because on the morning of the third day, many years ago, Christ

became the firstfruits of the resurrection. Everyone comments on how beautiful everything is at Christmas – and it is. But Easter is more beautiful.

As I have pondered why I could speak to her at her bedside and even speak words of devotion and prayer as she literally drew her last breath without shedding tears, that had caused me to carry out some self-examination. My conclusion is that throughout that beautiful week, we were surrounded by the beauty of the Gospel through words of Scripture, devotion, prayer, and the beauty of Lutheran hymnody thanks to Spotify.

And I reminded myself that all of things I have said from this pulpit in regard to the death of saints and the resurrection of Christ and what that means for our future; All of the things that I have said to family members of loved ones at their deathbed or funeral; All of the words concerning Jesus of Nazareth, the child of Mary are not pious platitudes to make you feel better during difficult days. The Gospel is our reality, and it is beautiful.

The Son of God entered the world to be our Savior and take away the sting of death. Martin Luther said that when he first understood the true nature of the Gospel and the forgiveness of God for the first time; when he finally understood that the righteousness of Christ had been placed upon him; he said it was as if the gates of heaven had been opened to him. He felt true comfort and contentment for the first time in his life.

When you hear the Word of God, what do you feel? John the Baptist, the unborn baby inside Elizabeth leaped for joy hearing the words of Mary. He knew that the Christ was in his midst. When you hear the voice of God spoken in His Word, what do you feel?

The body and blood of Christ Himself will soon be in our midst through the miracle of the sacramental union and communion we are blessed to share. What do you feel?

Again, faith is not an emotion. I am not talking about whipping up emotional excitement for the sake of having emotion. But faith and the Word of God bring forth genuine emotion, because the promise of salvation is real. The joy of the Gospel; the hope of the resurrection is beautiful. This being our reality, a child of God cannot be indifferent toward God. Your Creator loved you so much that He sent His Son to be the child of Mary. Your Creator loved you so much that He offered the life of His own Son so that you will live forever in His eternal kingdom.

Anyone who believes this greatest of all Good News cannot live life comfortably numb. So I ask you, "What do you feel?" What do you feel when you hear the children of our church tell the Christmas story on Christmas Eve? What do you feel when we share the light of the Christ candle and wish one another a Merry Christmas? What do you feel as you look into the eyes of your loved ones as you share the joy of the Word of God and the light of salvation?

John the Baptist, the unborn baby inside Elizabeth leaped for joy hearing the words of Mary. He knew that the Christ was in his midst. When it is revealed to you that the Christ is in your midst, what do you feel? Amen.