

First Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, MI
Rediscovering Jesus: Life Sharer
Rev. Dr. John Judson
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Psalm 16:8-11; John 6:35-40

Minus one-hundred-ninety-six degrees Celsius. Anyone know how cold that is in real temperature? It is -320 degrees Fahrenheit. It is almost as cold as our basement gets during the winter here when we don't turn on the heater. But other than our basement there are few places or processes that need that kind of cold. Dry ice is only -109.3 Fahrenheit. So why would anyone need that kind of cold? The answer is, to possibly live forever. Today as we meet in this pleasant sanctuary there are about 500 people who have had their bodies placed in cryogenic chambers with the hope that one day they can be thawed out and medicine can miraculously revive them, transform their genes, and make them live forever. They want to be medically resurrected. And lest you think this is some sort of anomaly, think again. There is a multi-billion-dollar business out there where scientists are dedicating themselves to solving the riddles of the aging process. They are looking to not only slow the aging process so we can live for hundreds of years but stop the aging process all together so that we never die. And why are they doing this? They are doing this because the billionaires who fund them do not want to go through the door of death.

What is the door of death? The door of death is the one door that only one person has ever gone through and come back again. It is the door we go through when we breathe our last breath, our heart stops, and our brain activity ceases. It is the door that human beings have been aware of since the dawn of time and have feared for just as long. What is on the other side of the door we wonder? Is it reincarnation as a different being? Is it animation as a spirit? Is it to the eternal hunting ground or golf course? Almost every civilization has imagined what is on the other side of the door of death. In the earliest Hebrew scriptures there was nothing on the other side of the door, death was the end. In Greek and later Hebrew scripture Sheol is on the other side of the door. Sheol is this shadowy, dimly lit world from which one never came back. This is what the Psalmist believed, "For you do not give me up to Sheol or let your faithful one see the Pit." This is not referring to life in heaven, but merely that God protects from death and its aftermath. Only in the time of Jesus were people cognizant of an afterlife with God. Even so, few people were excited about going through the door of death. And so, Jesus addresses this reality throughout the Gospel of John, and rather than having people fear going through it, he wants to give them hope.

To understand how our morning's text works we need to set the stage by drawing upon the heart of John's theology. And to do so, what I am going to do is use images rather than philosophical or theological language. I do so because this is what John does. John paints theological pictures for us to see so we can gain a deeper understanding into who Jesus is and what Jesus came to do. Let's begin then. We begin with the image of the door of death. From all appearances it is a door that only swings one way, inward. People go in and never come out. But then one day, the door mysteriously swings the other direction and out steps the Word. The Word had been with God and was God. The Word was also life. What this means is that the Word made flesh, Jesus, was more than a preacher, teacher, and healer. The Word made flesh was life, the very life of God. So imagine, if you will, that life is like a light shining out from God's own self. That light is what brought life into being. That light is what gives us life. And that light was not stuck on the other side of the door, but was now shining forth from Jesus of Nazareth, the light of the world. This is what Jesus means when he speaks of himself as the bread of life. I realize it is mixing metaphors, but he is the life that comes when people eat bread that allows them never to be hungry or thirsty. This is life sustained by the life that is shining from Jesus.

Where we go next with our image is that Jesus, the Word made Flesh, who is the life of the world, has come to share that life. Jesus does not simply radiate that light and life so that people will admire him. He shares it. He shares it with anyone and everyone who wants it. Years ago, my next younger brother went to a scientific conference in Siberia. The first day there was a buffet lunch. My brother and his American colleagues waited politely to get in line. That was a mistake. The Russians in the room immediately swarmed the buffet like locusts and there was literally nothing left for the Americans. Some people see Jesus' light and life like that. There is only so much to go around, and only certain people can have some of it. The Gospel of John paints a different picture. Verse 40 puts it this way. "This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life." In other words, Jesus is like the server at a reception who never seems to run out of those little hors d'oeuvres. They just keep coming and coming. This is what Jesus does. He keeps offering life. He says, here it is. Come and get it. And the most amazing thing about this life is that it is not a thing, but a connection to the life of Jesus, which is a connection to life in God. And this connection can never be severed. So just like Jesus glows with the life of God, so too do we.

This image then changes the sign and the hinges on the door of death. It changes the door of death to the door of life that swings in both directions. I say this because at the end of verse forty, we hear Jesus saying that people who receive life from him have eternal life and he will raise them up. Note carefully what Jesus says. Those who take the life he shares "have eternal life." He does not say, will have eternal life when they die. He says they have eternal life now - in this moment. They have it because they are sharing in the life Jesus offers which is the very life of God. Thus, when we walk through the door, it is not the door of death, but it is the door of life because we already possess the life Jesus has shared. We are moving if you will, from light into light. Finally, the image is that the door swings both ways. We hear this when Jesus says, "And I will raise them up at the last day." This my friends is resurrection; resurrection like Jesus' resurrection in which we are raised up in the fullness of life. How this works, what are the physics of this, I don't know, but I know that Jesus promises that the life he shares is a life that not only sustains forever, but that comes full circle, without a cryo-chamber or life extending therapy.

If I were a good Southern Baptist, like many of my friends, I would give an altar call. But we are Presbyterians, and so what I want to challenge you to do this week is this, bask in the light. I want to challenge you to bask in the light and life that Christ has given you. Doing so without fear, without worry. Simply see the new sign on the door, that says door of life.