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“Death to life” The Rev. Kara Leslie (03/10/2024, Fourth Sunday in Lent)

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Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable unto you, O Lord, and the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

In the children's Sunday school room, we have a wooden Noah's ark set to tell the story about Noah's ark. It's a wonderful well-built boat, and there are lots of figurines that come with it. And then, of course, there's two animals. There's animals, two of each kind of animal. And I have to tell you truthfully, this story is very scary. And it's frightening because the snakes are as big as the giraffes. It is not an easy story to play with, I promise you. And the snakes are scary. And I don't care how big your boat is. A snake is a snake.

And I would not want to get on a Noah's ark. I would not want to get on a little bitty fishing boat with a snake. So when we read the story today about the snakes, I just wonder why they even had to get on the boat. Why couldn't we just leave them there on the land?

Now in my book, it may be in yours, a snake is a snake is a snake. And the best snake is not alive. The Israelites complained about the quality of food and snakes appeared and they started killing people. This is not an easy image, but then God tells Moses who has been on his knees praying for these ruthless people for so long to get up and make a bronze snake on a pole. It takes time to do this. And Moses wants to make sure that he does this weird thing well. And he takes the snake and wraps it around the walking stick that he's carried. God says that when everyone, when anyone is bitten, if they

will look at this,
they shall live death to life. It hasn't even been a month since we
were all gathered around
watching the game. It has been less than a month since we had every
kind of chip possible,
every kind of dip, friends, beverages, all watching the game. Now we
can say who won the game,
but we often like to talk about the commercials, because the
commercials are often the best part.
Now this game was exceptionally exciting, I have to admit. But one of
my favorite commercials
this year was from Setafil. It's a lotion. And the theme was game time
glow. Game time glow.
A teen and her father are not connecting. They're not connecting at
all. She ignores his attempts
to relate, leaving the house without telling him where she's going,
being in the kitchen,
heating something in the microwave and he walks in with his phone to
show something and she opens
a door in his face and walks out the other way. And of course, we're
teenagers like to spend their
time on their phone and their rooms. So this is what's happening the
whole time of the commercial.
Then one of the games comes on and the announcer says, Taylor Swift is
in the house. And the teenager
comes down the stairs and peeks around the corner and looks, oh, there
she is. But then when the
camera's off of her, the teenager goes back upstairs. And then when
the big game comes on, he knocks
on her door and walks in and has a t-shirt for her with number 13. His
arms are adored,
dorned with all kinds of Taylor Swift friendship bracelets. And he is
so ready for the game and
she's there at the mirror putting on this cream on her face. And he's
like, just for you. There's
no words in the commercial, but he hands her the shirt. And as he's
leaving, he takes his fingers
and dips it in the cream and marks it on his face like this. And he
backs out quietly and then
leaves. She puts the shirt on and she giggles. And she goes downstairs
and she sits next to her dad
and they cuddle and watch Taylor Swift, oh, and the game. Death to
life. It's a strange question
to ask you, but I will. Have you ever been dead? I know. I know it's
not normal to ask that question
because you're here with me and you're breathing, but I bet some of
you have been dead.
Now, I'm not talking about the meaning with heart rate and brain
activity,
or if you've ever been in a very life crisis and you've walked the

water across the river,
or you've had an after death experience in coming back. I've heard those stories,
but I'm talking about a different kind of death. Maybe you know someone who has struggled with addiction, or some kind of a thing that controls their life. Every moment they live for that next thing, that next drink, that next tit, that next thing to buy on the TV, or whatever thing runs and ruins their life. It becomes everything to them and they can't live without it.
Maybe you're in a relationship currently or have been in a relationship where your partner, your parent, your child, your spouse takes the very life out of you. There's no respect, no compassion, no love, no genuine kindness. And if you ask anyone who's been in one of those relationships, they will tell you that it is the worst kind of life sucking loneliness. There is.
Or maybe depression has been with you all your life, and especially it has been bad recently. And you can barely get out of bed and then some days you just don't. And you think, well, I'm not going to even go talk to somebody because nobody really cares if I'm alive or dead.
We hear the scripture from Ephesians that says, but God who is rich in mercy, but God who is rich in mercy, and then death turns into life. Maybe you go to AA or NA or this person in your life says, I'm going to get a sponsor and I'm going 90 days, 90 meetings. And I'm going to turn everything over to the higher power. Or if you are in a toxic relationship, you make clear boundaries.
You get into counseling. You go home a different way. You move out of the room. You move out of the house. You find life again. Or after days of crying and despair, you just say, I'm going to just try medication. I'll just try it. And slowly, you're no longer living in that basement. You're living up and above and you're able to find some joy in life. We are made alive in Christ through His grace and love and mercy. Jesus tells us, just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up. And whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.
What was once dead is now alive in Christ. You know, Lent's supposed to be a very burdensome and somber time of giving up everything that we really enjoy. I mean, Lent's supposed to be kind of a miserable 40 days. We're not supposed to say the A word. We're

not supposed to have any chocolate or joy or anything. We come here and it's heavy. But even here in this place, there is life. There is life in passing of the peace. There's life and forgiveness. There is life in hearing the word of God. And there is life in the heavenly banquet when we all all feast together in His grace. So even if you're feeling defeated, down and dead, know that you have been given life in Christ. And this life is full of grace, is full of love and full of mercy. It is immeasurable. So if your depression is the worst, it's ever been. Know in your heart that God has more love for you than you can imagine. If the relationships in your life are digging your grave, feel God's arms holding you and lifting you up out of that. And if the temptations of life for like a tornado in your thinking, hear these words. You have been made in Christ Jesus for good. For His good. Death to life. Last Sunday, we started our lay Eucharistic visiting ministry. We have two people in the nine o'clock and the nine-ten who will come forward and they will receive a communion kit. And this last week, we saw 42 people. 42 people were ministered to through the communion kits and the care and the prayers of our team. Now I don't expect every week to be like that, but this week was a wonderful celebration. And I want to share one of those stories with you. I took Holy Communion to a nursing home here. A wonderful lawyer used to sing in our choir. And now she is in the memory unit, funny, witty, but pleasantly confused as we say. And when it 4.30 and it was dinner time. And we were there and she had chicken pot pie and a salad and carrot cake. And there was another woman at the table who lives there also and she had eaten all her carrot cake and barely any of her vegetables. But then there was somebody else that was a friend of the member that used to go here. And so we were talking and we visited for a while and I set the communion table there. And this is a little small dining room and I'd set out the white cloth and the cup and the bread and I had everything ready. And so we were all four going to have communion together. I mean, I had just come there to visit one woman, but all of a sudden the table got bigger. And then we were going through the communion and in the kitchen, which is an open kitchen concept,

there was a woman there that was very round and full and love and dark. Dark skin, lots of curls, long eyelashes, energetic, beautiful and curious. She was looking over what we were doing and she washed the dishes. Look over what are we doing? Wash the dishes. And then I said, do you want to come? She's like, I've not been saved. I'm not going to, that is not the place to even talk about that. And I said, this is about God's love for you. Come. And she came and I took that moistened morsel and I placed it in her mouth and she leaned her head on my shoulder and wept. She lifted it up and said, I got makeup all over. I said, don't worry about it. And she leaned back down and cried some more and not just little tears, big tears that her whole body shook because she felt love. My friends, that is death to life. Amen.