

Easter Sunday – The Resurrection of Our Lord

April 24, 2011 - Amazing Grace Lutheran Church

1 Corinthians 15:14-23

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. (NIV)

On Feb. 27, 1991, at the height of Desert Storm, a woman named Ruth Dillow received a very sad message no mother wants to hear. The call came from the Pentagon and stated that her son, Clayton, Private 1st Class, had stepped on a mine in Kuwait & was dead. Ruth Dillow later wrote, *"I can't begin to describe my grief & shock. It was almost more than I could bear. For 3 days I wept. For 3 days I expressed anger & loss. For 3 days people tried to comfort me, to no avail because the loss was too great."* But 3 days later the telephone rang again. The voice on the other end said, *"Mom, it's me. I'm alive."* Ruth said, *"I couldn't believe it at first. But then I recognized his voice, & he really was alive."* The message was all a mistake! She said, *"I laughed, I cried, I felt like turning cartwheels, because my son whom I had thought was dead, was really alive. I'm sure none of you can even begin to understand how I felt."*

But I believe followers of Jesus on Easter know and understand quite a bit how Ruth Dillow felt. More than any son was dead, God's Son died. Jesus was not just any loved one – He was the One upon whom people had placed all their hopes. They trusted in Jesus to be their Savior and now He was dead. And this was no mistake! Jesus' disciples had witnessed it with their own eyes. They had viewed His scourged back and thorn cut head, they saw the nails; they witnessed His blood spilling to the ground. Many observed the cross where Jesus was crucified and killed. Without a doubt Jesus was dead. Some even watched as His dead body was wrapped up and laid into a tomb. But on the third day Jesus' disciples also hear a message that changes their lives. Our lives too are changed forever by these three sweet and simple words: ***"He has risen!"*** This is what we are here to celebrate today! This is the good news that we came to hear more about! So laugh, cry, and do cartwheels if you want (after the service) for: **Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!**

1 Corinthians chapter 15 is one of the most familiar chapters in the Bible – often identified as the "Resurrection" chapter. In these verses before us of this well known

chapter, Paul is addressing some skeptics and doubters. Evidently, some in the church in Corinth were teaching that there is no bodily resurrection from the dead. This was a common perspective of both philosophy and religion in the Greek culture. You might recall that when Paul went to Athens, the people listened to him teach for some time, but as soon as Paul mentioned the resurrection his large crowd began to disperse. Some began to call Paul a babblers.

So Paul wants to make a very important point and wants to state it very clear. If there is no bodily resurrection, Paul explains, that means Christ did not rise from the dead. And dear friends, if Jesus did not rise from the dead we are all in serious trouble! Paul teaches frankly that without Christ's resurrection we face a hopeless end. ***"If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith."*** If Jesus did not come out of the grave then Paul would say that I chose a worthless profession, and you are just as bad for coming out to listen to what I have to say. Paul goes on: ***"more than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead."*** If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then Paul, and Peter, and the women, and the 500 other disciples who saw Jesus with their own eyes are all liars. Then, the apostles are going out into the world with a made up story and are even willing to suffer and die for a lie. Then Paul must have been hallucinating when He ran into Jesus on the road to Damascus.

It gets even worse. ***"And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost."*** If Jesus did not rise on the third day like He promised, like He did, then our faith in Jesus is of no value, in vain. We would have to stand before God on our own. Imagine doing that, imagine having to give an account before God for every evil thought you ever had, and having to explain every bad word, or lie, or gossip, or slander that ever came out of your mouth. Imagine God opening up the book of your life and pointing out every thing you have ever done wrong and everything you have ever failed to do right. On Judgment Day we would owe God big – you and I would have to pay up with eternal death and damnation. This is what it means when Paul writes if Christ had not been raised then: ***"you are still in your sins."*** All who die believing in Jesus would be lost.

Do we understand the ramifications of saying there is no bodily resurrection from the dead? That would mean Jesus has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, we Christians are some pretty pathetic people. Paul puts it this way: ***"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."*** If this Easter truth never happened, we are wasting our time. How terrible to follow a religion that proves to be totally false in the end. Think of all the time, resources, and energy you wasted, all the hope and trust you put into it for nothing. All the sacrifice and suffering will go for naught. Instead of coming to church, instead of serving our Savior and loving our neighbor, we could be out in the world doing whatever we wanted. We could go for broke and live like the Epicureans saying: ***"Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we will surely die."***

Thanks be to God on this most glorious day that this is certainly not the case! Easter morning removes all the ‘ifs’ when it comes to our Christian faith. We gladly and confidently proclaim with Paul again on this Easter day: **“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!”** So what we are doing at church now is not useless! Paul would say this message is the most important one to preach, and all of you made a very wise decision to come and hear it this morning. Paul would vow that Peter, the women, the 500 other disciples, and Himself to whom Jesus last appeared, were not liars who made up a big story of how Jesus came back from the dead. They were surprised witnesses, sometimes slow to believe, and at times filled with doubt themselves. They only ran to tell others about the resurrection because it was the truth. Why would they suffer and die for a lie?

It is a fact - Jesus rose from the dead. Do we know the ramifications of this truth? It means you and I can trust all Jesus’ promises. It means our faith is not in vain. It means that when Jesus said on the cross it is finished – it really is finished – our sins are all paid for in full. God accepted the sacrifice Jesus made for you and now – because you are in Christ -- you are no longer in your sins. You are forgiven. You are saved. It means all who fall asleep in Jesus are just that – asleep. Because at death our souls will soar straight to our Father in heaven, and our bodies will rest secure in the dust until the day Jesus returns again as judge.

For Jesus is **“the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.”** I don’t know how many farmers or former farmers we have with us this morning. But a firstfruit was the first sheaf of the harvest grain. A firstfruit was a good indication that the rest of the crop would follow and what it would look like. In other words, God is telling us that the risen Christ is the pledge and proof of the resurrection of all of God’s redeemed people to eternal life. As Jesus promises: **“because I live, you also will live” (John 14)**. Like Christ, we will come out of our graves. God **“will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like Christ’s glorious body” (Philippians 3)**.

Today, we hear again a message even better than having a child whom we thought was dead call to say he is really alive. We hear the best news of all – He has risen. Our Savior who died for us has risen. He has risen indeed! This is the best news because it means death has been swallowed up in victory. Death has lost its’ sting. The fear and power of hell is vanquished. The thing about the message of Easter is it is a simple message to preach. Any preacher can get up here on Easter morning and get it right – any Christian can tell someone else and not worry about having the right words to say - all we have to do is point to the tomb. It’s empty. Jesus gives us something no other world religion or major religious leader even attempts to claim – an open grave. The Savior who lived for us and died for us has been raised from the dead. That means no matter who you are, no matter what you have done, no matter where you have been – you don’t have to face a hopeless end, because Jesus has won for us all an endless hope. For: **“Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.”** Alleluia! Amen.

