

*Easter Sunday - The Resurrection of Our Lord*

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Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

*Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance : that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. (NIV)*

What is of first importance to you? What is the heart, core, and center of who you are and what you do? What gives you reason to live, and hope for the future? What is so important that you might call it the foundation of your life?

Is your job of first importance? Unfortunately, many people throughout our country, and even some in our own church, have found out that a job can be pulled out like a rug from under your feet. Is your money and savings of first importance? Again many have learned the hard way that it can be easy come and easy go. What we had can vanish in an instant? Do you consider your health and fitness of first importance? Being fit and healthy did not help that 22 year old professional ballplayer who pitched for the Angels when tragically his car was struck by a minivan the other day. Health can be fleeting too as we all know. Very recently our church members attended funerals of friends of the ages of 31 and 43 as cancer quickly took away their health. Would you say “my family” is of first importance? Then what happens when family relationships are torn apart or completely gone? What are you left with when family moves out or moves away?

What is of first importance? If it is our job, our money, our health, or even our family what happens when these things are suddenly taken away? All we had to live for would be for nothing! Our hope gone. The foundation of our life would be shattered!

Dear friends: this is why we rejoice that the Lord has given us something far more important to live for and to place our hope in. We have a foundation that can never be moved. We have a hope that is certain. We have a reason to live that can't ever be taken away. What is of first importance? What is the heart, core, and center of who we are and what we do? Jesus. Jesus, Jesus, only Jesus. Of first importance is the good news of what Jesus has done for us. Of first importance is the new life Jesus has given to us. Of first importance is the eternal life Jesus has won for us. My prayer this morning is that the good news of Easter is always for every one of us: **Of First Importance.**

Paul devotes this whole great chapter to the resurrection. The fact Jesus rose from the dead proving He truly defeated sin, death, and the devil was at the heart and center of all the early disciples did and taught. It still is the Bible's and the church's central teaching. This is the gospel, the good news, Paul preached and upon which people take their stand. This is, as Paul says, the gospel by which you are saved. Paul makes it very clear that the message of Jesus is most important. ***“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”***

Can you see why this is of first importance? Whatever illustration we might use to teach this basic and clear message of Scripture, there is not another message as important. When your brother or sister who is always annoying you gets caught doing something wrong, children are you willing to step in and take their punishment from mom and dad? If a co-worker or neighbor foolishly ran up a credit card debt they could not repay, who of us would say *“let me pay it all for you?”* If a person committed a crime would we willingly go to jail for them, would we suffer the death penalty in their place?

Jesus did all that and more for you and me and the world. ***“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.”*** Jesus took our punishment. Jesus paid the price. Jesus went to the cross and suffered. Jesus was given the death penalty. Why? For us. All this for our sins. Our sins were all put on Jesus on Good Friday and Jesus paid their awful price with His holy precious blood, and His innocent suffering and death. And after Jesus died He was buried.

But that wasn't the end of Jesus for we know ***“he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”*** At times Jesus enemies demanded a sign from Jesus. They wanted to know what gave Jesus the authority to drive the moneychangers out of the temple. They wanted to know who gave Him the authority to forgive sins. They wanted Jesus to prove that He was sent from God. Jesus told them, a couple of times, that no sign would be given to them except for this one - that on the third day He would rise. They could destroy the temple, His body, but like Jonah in the belly of the fish for three days so on the third Day the Son of Man would rise. And Jesus did. So Jesus is not a liar or a fraud but all His Words are true. He came from God as He said. Jesus has the power to forgive. All our sins are paid for in full. Without a shadow of a doubt Jesus lives and we also will live. And this is the message we preach and believe. It is of first importance.

But if something like Jesus' resurrection is that important we would want to be real sure, wouldn't we? If a friend of yours came to you with a story that seemed a bit far fetched what would it take for you to believe it? Would you believe if your friend describes the whole event in great detail? Perhaps, but you might also know your friend to have quite the imagination. What if another friend also witnessed it? What if three friends came back and reported it? What if eleven or twelve people you know told you the exact same story? When would you finally acknowledge that it actually happened?

Are you starting to get the point of how Easter is based on fact? The legal system in Paul's day required two or three eye witnesses to legitimize a case. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead has been proven by far more! Paul lists an abundance of eyewitnesses. ***“He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time...he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally***

*born.*” Our Savior makes sure there is no doubt about it. Jesus lives. Sin is paid. The devil has lost His power over us. We don’t have to fear death or hell any longer. Now we have a reason to live, and hope for the future. Now we have a foundation that can never be shaken. Now we have something of first importance.

Or do we? Is Jesus of first importance to us? Is the fact that Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life because God has declared us not guilty the most important thing in our lives? If it was of first importance don’t you think our church should be this full every Sunday? Since it is the very foundation of our lives don’t you think our Bible class attendance might be a bit higher? If Jesus is more important than anything else should we think some of the things we think? Should we say some of the words we say and do some of things we do? If Jesus is most important why to we ignore His Words & give into friends and peer pressure? If the message of Jesus dying and rising is of first importance then shouldn’t we be like Paul working harder than anyone? Shouldn’t we consistently be inviting others to church, continually praying for those who don’t know the joy of Jesus’ resurrection, and constantly sharing the good news with all we know and don’t know? The truth is Jesus has not always been most important to us. We have sinned and deserve nothing less than death and punishment.

But thankfully our Lord put you and me as of first importance when He placed all our sins on Jesus. Thankfully, Jesus considered you and me and the rest of the world of first importance when He carried our sins to the cross and offered His blood and life to pay for those sins. Thankfully, God put you and me as of first importance when He buried our sins with Jesus, but raised Jesus from the dead to guarantee that’s where our sins will remain. Thankfully, the Lord made us more important than anything else when at our baptisms He clothed us in Jesus’ righteousness. He considered us most important when He called us to faith through His gospel. Thankfully, our gracious Lord still considers us of first importance as He freely announces that for Jesus’ sake all our sins, even our sins of not keeping Him as of first importance, are forgiven.

The author Ben Patterson writes of a tribe in the jungles of East Asia. A missionary showed them a movie about Jesus. It was the first time they had heard of Jesus. The people were caught up in the movie, so much so that when Jesus, whom they had seen heal the sick and be adored by children, was beaten by taunting soldiers, they began to shout and demand the outrage stop. The missionary had to actually stop the film and tell them there was more to the story. Soon after restarting the movie, he had to stop it again, when Jesus was on the cross, and again tell them there was more. The people began weeping and wailing loudly at Jesus’ death. Once again, the movie was started. This time, though, the scene was the resurrection. Pandemonium broke out. A party erupted. The noise was deafening jubilation. People were dancing and slapping each other on the back. Christ is risen indeed! It was as if they were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ resurrection for the first time.

I pray that same kind of joy and excitement fill our hearts this Easter and every day. For while our jobs may be pulled out from under us, Jesus has given us a far more important job of being His witnesses and our work for Him is never in vain. While our money and savings might come and go, because of Jesus we always have the Lord as our greatest and most precious treasure. If our family gets torn apart or moves out or moves away, we still have Jesus, a friend of sinners, who will never leave us or forsake us.

While our health slips despite our efforts to stay fit, we now mock even death itself saying: "***Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?***," because Jesus has made our earthly deaths but the gate to heaven. Of first importance, the heart and core and center of who we are and what we do - what else could replace Jesus? He is our hope, our stay, our life, our foundation, our Savior, our all. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Nothing is more important than this! Amen.