

Pastor Luke C. Werre

April 4, 2021

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 15:19-26

The Resurrection of Our Lord

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION IS JUST THE BEGINNING

It was Monday of Holy Week, just 6 days ago. The morning news chattered in the background as I was getting ready for the day. The news anchor reported on the progress of the vaccine roll out. But before we become too much at ease, she reminded us that a new strain of the virus has emerged from the UK and there's a chance that this strain will be deadlier and even more contagious. Those were her actual words.

Likely, the reporter was only trying to be responsible, to keep us informed of what's happening around us. Yet, the presentation felt almost cruel. You are not permitted a breather, a momentary sigh of relief. No, you must remain under a cloud of dread. And what does a dread that keeps a whole world braced in fear emanate from? Is it not the continuously looming threat of death?

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead which we are celebrating today breaks us free from the threat of death. We could say that Christ is the death of death itself. Surely, we don't want to live recklessly, as that would not give glory to God. But because of Jesus we no longer need to trudge along under a permanent cloud of dread either. Therefore throughout this Easter season we'll be celebrating that Christ is the death of fear.

In the portion of the Bible we are meditating on today, God the Holy Spirit moved the apostle Paul to use a vivid expression to convey what Christ's resurrection means for us. He calls it "the firstfruits." "Firstfruits" is exactly as it sounds. Paul's original listeners 2000 years ago were quite familiar with the term. It was a major component of their year-round worship. Whenever a new crop was coming in, they would bring to the temple a first sampling, a first portion of what they harvested. This act of worship was not to say, "Here you go, God, we're giving you something." Just the opposite. God told them to bring it and present it as a token of what was in store for *them*. It was a visual token of God's blessing to them. In essence, God's message was, "Do you see this little basket of

grain or olives or dates you brought here? That's just the start, just the beginning of the abundant harvest I'm going to bless you with."

It is like when you pick that very first bucket of ripe tomatoes in late summer and take it to Grandma's house because you know that soon your garden will be putting out bushel baskets of tomatoes.

This is how Christ is the Firstfruits of believers who have died. Christ's resurrection is just the beginning of many more resurrections to come, a huge harvest of resurrections of those who believed in Him!

This whole past year television news programs kept a running death tally in the corner of the screen. We are instinctively appalled at that number. Why? Whether or not we are consciously aware of it, the Bible says written on every human heart like computer code is the reality that there is a God who judges us. In fact, God Himself tells us in the Bible that death is punishment for sin. If that's the case, then the fact that we die is a sure indicator that things won't bode well for us when we must face our Judge.

We inherited this circumstance from the first humans – Adam and Eve. No vaccine can save us from it. The sad truth is that even if we have been vaccinated, the vaccine has not saved us from death. We still are going to die. We are still going to face our Judge.

But Jesus Christ has rescued us from sin and death and from judgment. On Good Friday we observed the truth that He died on a cross. Jesus sacrificed His life to atone for our sin to God. Now all who trust in Jesus are released from God's judgment. All who trust in Jesus are released from the punishment for sin. All who trust in Jesus are released from death.

Jesus demonstrated this by coming back to life. Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead is a historical fact. It is not a tradition or a myth. It is not merely a philosophy, an ideal, a value or something symbolic. He physically came out of the grave. And since He rose from the dead, He promises that all who trust in Him will also rise from the dead. Here's what the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15: *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.*

Christ rose physically from the grave to live in glory forever. All who believe in Christ will rise physically from the grave to live in glory forever. The Bible says God will raise us up from our graves and recreate our bodies even if there was nothing left of us but

dust. Even if we were cremated and our ashes were thrown to the wind. Even if we were drowned in the depths of the ocean and were eaten by fish. This will not be too hard for God. After all, He created all things to begin with simply by speaking it into existence.

And when He resurrects us, our bodies will be changed. We will no longer have perishable, mortal bodies. We will have everlasting bodies, bodies no longer weakened or ruined by sin. Our bodies will be like Christ's body – holy and never-endingly vibrant and suitable to live in the presence of God.

But when will all this happen? Paul wrote, *When Christ comes*. There will be a final day for this world. Christ will return visibly to this world on the clouds of heaven. The Bible says every eye will see Him. All who believed in Jesus will be raised to live with Him forever.

The resurrection is the ultimate solution to every earthly problem. Without the anticipation of the resurrection of our bodies from the dead, the Apostle Paul indicates we would be wasting our time with Jesus Christ. He writes, *If only for this life we have hope in Christ, then we are to be pitied more than all men*.

But Christ's resurrection is just the beginning, the first sampling, the firstfruits of a great and vast resurrection of countless believers from the beginning of time until the Last Day. This is why at every Christian burial, standing at the graveside, the pastor reads these words: *We now commit this body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life*.

Springtime is glorious as we get to see all the budding leaves and the explosion of flowering things. When this pastor stands graveside he often wonders, "What will this look like –this cemetery- on the day Christ returns?" The Day Christ returns will be like a grand springtime as it will be an explosive bloom of countless believers whose bodies sprout to life eternal.

On Easter morning, one year ago, we conducted a sunrise parking lot service, broadcasting the service on the radio from within an empty building to worshipers in their cars. Here is a paragraph from the sermon that morning:

This morning brings us good news. You have been rescued from Coronavirus. Not by mitigation, by masks, by social distancing or by a vaccine. You have been rescued by Jesus' resurrection from the dead. When He rose from the dead Jesus ripped away the

stifling shroud of death that covered us. He has robbed coronavirus of any power to stop us from living, for He promises never-ending life to all who have faith in Him.

Christ is the firstfruits from the dead. He is just the beginning of the resurrection. He is the death of fear.