

Sermon He is Risen!

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He is Risen!

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ²So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

³So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹²and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” ¹⁴At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

¹⁷Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ”

¹⁸Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

¹⁹On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” ²²And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of anyone, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

²⁴Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”



²⁶A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

²⁸Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.¹

He is Risen!

On this great day, this Resurrection Sunday, Easter, we have arrived at the destination we have pursued for the past several weeks in this series we have been calling ***Road to Resurrection***.

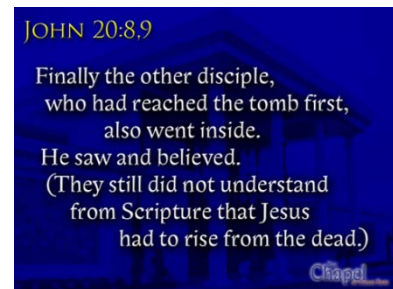
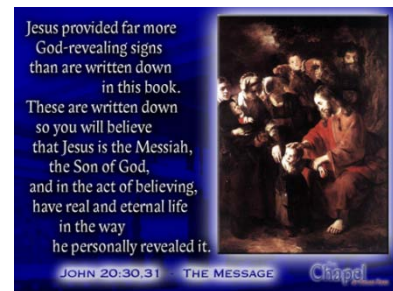
Lenten disciplines, the group writing project on our blog, these sermons in this series, have all been intended to prepare us for this great day. To hear this story once again, that Jesus is risen from the dead, and this is cause for great celebration!

All of this coincides with the intent of the account I just read from the Gospel of John, that [we] may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing [we] may have life in his name.²

Beyond the bunnies and peeps, beyond the chocolate and ham, beyond the *dressing up* and sales and welcoming of spring... the point of this great day, Easter, is that we may believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be, and that by believing we may have life in His name.

I’ve said that today is the most important celebration of the Christian year, and the Resurrection is the most important event in human history; it is also the most important *theological concept* for us to embrace.

It is no small thing, grasping the importance of the Resurrection. The eyewitness account from John’s Gospel (John is understood to be that “other disciple” that he mentions) makes it clear that even those who were the closest followers of Jesus, these friends we call the Disciples that would become the Apostles of the Church... even these who were standing right in the



¹ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Jn 20:1-31.

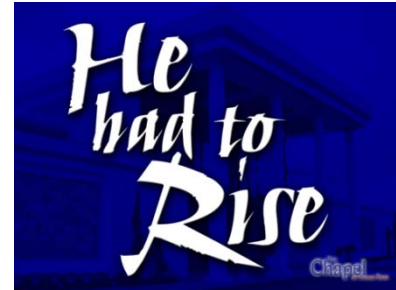
² *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Jn 20:31.

empty tomb there didn't grasp the importance of the resurrection of Jesus.

They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.³

He had to rise!

In my Bible, this account appears on page 1,000. I don't think it is *too much of a stretch* to say that the remaining 153 pages are here to help us understand the implications of this simple statement: **He had to rise.**



Understanding builds our faith; faith that leads to understanding **is** a saving faith, belief that genuinely produces an enriched life as we experience it now and results in eternal life with God.

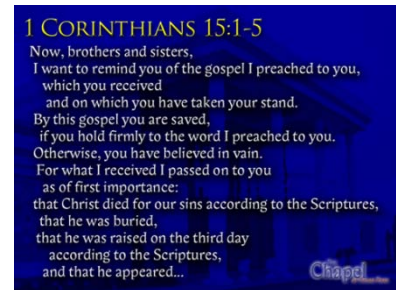
So let's see if we can *understand* a bit more about the Resurrection.

There is perhaps no more precise passage of Scripture that helps us understand the theological importance of the Resurrection than **1 Corinthians chapter 15** (Teresa read from this chapter earlier for us today).

The chapter begins with a similar admonition to what we read from the Gospel of John.

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,⁵ and that he appeared...⁴



Whatever else the Church may be about, good works, almsgiving, academic and theological pursuits, the arts, friends and fellowship... all of it is of secondary importance to **the Gospel** *on which you have taken your stand.*

- Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures
- He was buried
- He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures
- That he appeared to hundreds of eyewitnesses

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He was seen by many... inspected just like Thomas did, verifying His wounds, seeing that this was, indeed Jesus.

³ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Jn 20:9.

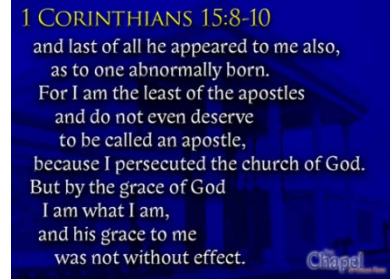
⁴ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). 1 Co 15:1-5.

Paul goes on to speak of an *appearance* of Jesus that resonates with many of us gathered here today: the **personal** appearance of Jesus.

⁸and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

⁹For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.⁵



We **can** rely on the Truth of the Resurrection of Jesus because of the historical eyewitness accounts, **and** we can rely on the accounts of those to whom Jesus continues to appear today.

In the Apostle Paul's case, we understand that there was a dramatic, visible appearance of Jesus. Paul was a zealous, religious Jew who thought the early *Jesus followers* were a threat to the true faith. So committed to his conviction that Christians were dangerous, he sought to exterminate them. He "persecuted the church of God" until he had an amazing encounter with Jesus.

This encounter and the dramatically changed life that resulted are testimonies to the Resurrection of Jesus. This is Paul's story. That Jesus appeared in Paul's life, a life so *very unlikely* to receive the grace of Jesus Christ, and by that grace made Paul what he was. That is Paul's story, and each of us who have come to faith in Jesus has a story too.

Now, I am no Apostle Paul... but I *was* a persecutor. I was an unlikely case, "one abnormally born" as Paul put it. I know that some of you have been followers of Jesus, Christians, nearly all your life; like my wife Laurie, you may not even have any memories of anything other than being a Christian (that is the best life; the life I want for my sons and grandchildren). But I didn't come to faith, I didn't **believe**, until I was a young adult (20).

I was one that was convinced that my life was in my own hands. That if I was going to be anything, it would be entirely due to my efforts, my hard work, and my *smarts*. I suppose I believed that there was a God, and the Christian God was as good as any other, but my faith was mostly in myself.

I knew Christians, but found them to be silly... and I wasn't shy about letting them know just how silly I thought they were. My favorite target of ridicule was my younger brother, who after coming to faith decided to *waste his life* by preparing to serve as a pastor.

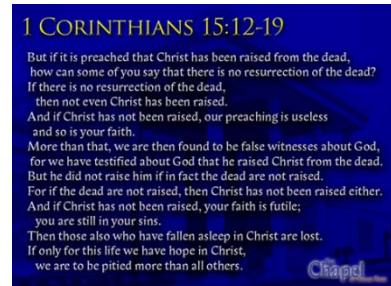
⁵ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). 1 Co 15:8-10.

But then Jesus **appeared**. Through a variety of circumstances, I found myself in an Assemblies of God Church in Hammond, Indiana... and after *checking it out* for a few months I came to believe. I experienced real change in my life, some of the dramatic change appeared immediately, and other changes were more ongoing that, of course, continue today (some 23 years later).

That change, that reality of Jesus and His appearance in my life, is evidence of His resurrected life... certainly not the only evidence, but reliable evidence nonetheless. The Resurrection power of Jesus is as work in lives today, including my life.

Looking back to chapter 15 in 1 Corinthians, we can see that these early believers found themselves confused and in error regarding resurrection. Was Jesus really raised from death? Is there a resurrection and eternal life for those who believe?

Paul's answer is a resounding **yes**.



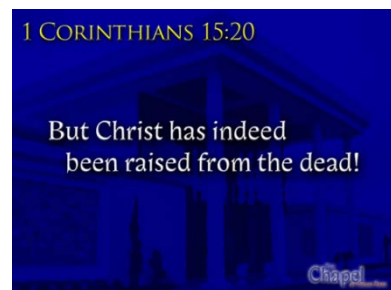
The most cogent statement in response to the implied questions of the doubters is found in verse 17.

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.⁶

There may be *differences of opinion* regarding the faith. Different ways to worship, different interpretations of elements of Scripture... but in this matter, according to Paul, there is no *wiggle room*. Without belief in Christ's resurrection, there is no Christianity. Without Christ's resurrection, there is no saving faith, no forgiveness of sins.

²⁰But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.⁷

He has been raised according to His own declaration, validating that His claims are true. He told us that He would be destroyed but raised again. And He *made good* on that promise.



He has been raised according to the prophetic words of the Old Testament Scriptures, demonstrating that Jesus is the Messiah long foretold by the Scriptures.

He has been raised breaking the power of death that came through a man (Adam).

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.⁸

⁶ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). 1 Co 15:17.

⁷ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). 1 Co 15:20.

He has been raised establishing the supremacy of Christ.

... the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷For he “has put everything under his feet.”⁹

He has been raised. **He is Risen!**

So what?

How will **this** Easter impact us?

I’m expecting to gain a pound or two this afternoon with ham, and Laurie’s special potatoes and her *now-famous* coconut cream pie for desert.



And I’ve really enjoyed this service with the great music and all...

But what lasting *spiritual* impact will I take away this Easter?

What *practical* use is all this today?

What understanding can I gain that will indeed build my faith, making a difference in this life and the next?

First, let’s take the plain admonition from our passage today in regard to **hope** for our loved ones, and our own hope for eternity.

It is fitting to honor our departed loved ones at Easter.

We place these lilies, these living symbols of sweet beauty, to remind us that although we miss our loved ones (we mourn), we know that those who believe live eternally. So we remember that this life is not anywhere near to **all there is**. We remember that in eternity death and decay, sickness and pain, and sorrow are **gone**.

We remember our loved ones on this Resurrection Sunday; specifically today we remember those printed in the bulletin whom friends and family from our congregation have honored with one of these lilies:



⁸ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). 1 Co 15:22.

⁹ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). 1 Co 15:23-27.

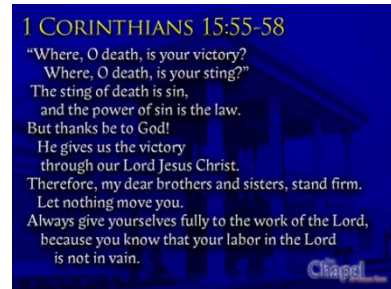
Watson & Hazel Argue
Bob Baker
Esther Baker
Buel Brodin
Bruce & Margaret Eklund
Keith M. Forbes Sr.

Grandma & Grandpa Dillon
Rob Goffigan
Maryann Gorniak
Gene Gillespie
Howard & Gertrude Halvorsen
Rev. & Mrs. P. S. Jones

Ruth Kean
Edward R. Kessner
Betty Jean Langdon
Gene & Hazel Opheim
David G. Welk
Robinson Williams

Though life as we understand it in these bodies has passed, these loved ones live...
more alive than ever in eternity with our God and Savior.

⁵⁵“Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?”
⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
⁵⁸Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.¹⁰



Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

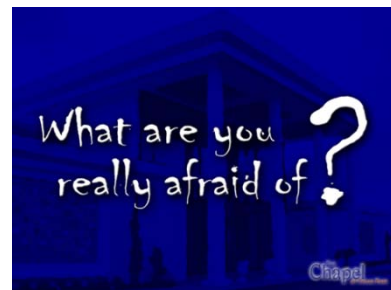
What have we to fear?

Some of you may have seen that I posed the question this weekend on Twitter and Facebook.

I asked “what are you really afraid of?”

Some of the responses were what might classify as *common phobias*:

- The dark
- Heights
- Spiders
- Toxic Mold



Others were deeper fears, maybe the kinds of things to which many of us can relate:

- Rejection
- Losing our “masks” and revealing the worst in us
- Losing the people we love
- Disappointing those who believe in us
- Failing as parents

And there were some, as I expected that mentioned fear of ***death and dying***.

Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). 1 Co 15:55-58.

On this Easter Day, on this Resurrection Sunday, know that the Resurrection of Jesus means that the claims of Christ can be trusted. **Jesus delivers us from our fears.**

Can Christ deal with our phobias? Yes, there is help for us from Jesus.

Can Christ meet us with our deeper fears?

- Rejection? Christ paid the price so that our sins are forgiven, making us acceptable to God Himself. When faced with rejection by friends, family, and colleagues, we can turn to Jesus for acceptance.
- Losing our “masks” and revealing the worst in us? God sees us more clearly than we see ourselves. And more than that, He has the power to transform our darkest places.
- Disappointing those who believe in us? Faith in Christ results in changed lives and good work. And when we do fail, we find forgiveness in through Jesus and the Holy Spirits help to restore relationships.

And what about the ultimate fear, the fear of dying and death?

Several Christian friends responded that while their faith in Jesus has freed them from the fear of death, there remains a fear of the dying process. Fear of sickness and painful, prolonged dying may occupy many of our thoughts.

The fear is understandable, but one of the most remarkable miracles we can witness, one that a pastor may get to see more than the average person, is how Christ gives us courage and faith, even in dying. There is strength for every day, even our darkest, most difficult days.

But what of death? If you are here today and fear death, you are not alone. I won't ask for a *show of hands*, nobody has to admit to this fear... but know that it is among the most common of fears. What comes with death? What if there is unfinished work? What if I'm not ready? What comes after death?

As you ought to expect, I pray about what I'm supposed to say in these few minutes on a Sunday morning. For today, I had a very real sense that there were two things:

1. I've already done; I felt like I needed to talk, again, at least a bit about my own story of coming to faith. And,
2. I need to tell you that you can be delivered from fear

Are you here today with fear? And maybe especially, are you here today with fear of death?

My challenge to you today is *take a step closer*. I don't believe that any of us are here by accident today. Some are here out of habit. Some are here to please a friend, or spouse, or other member of your family. Some may not know why you are here... but I sincerely believe that we are all here for a reason.

You've taken this step to be here this morning, for whatever reason... now take a step closer. Bring your failures and your fears. Bring your pride, your pain, your questions, and take a step closer.

For many of us, this would be one of thousands of steps closer (we've been at this life of faith for a while). Allow me to repeat the encouragement from God's Word:

Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.¹¹

But there may some here today who are taking the first steps toward God, maybe they are even steps *back* toward God.

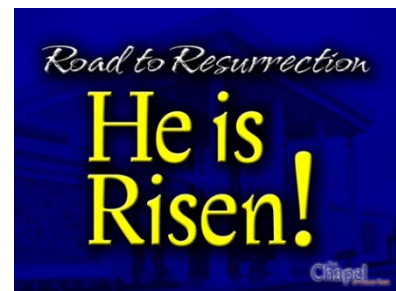
Go ahead and take that step closer today.

This celebration of a Resurrected Jesus, which has endured now for 2,000 years, makes for a great day to take a step toward God. To be delivered from fear. To find yourself a believer. To find new strength and courage in your faith. To give God some dead place that can be brought to life through the power of the Resurrection. This is a great day to take another step closer.

He is Risen!

Let's commit ourselves to our Risen Savior and Lord, again, in prayer.

- Freedom from fear
- Reason to believe
- Faith, saving faith, resulting in changed lives



¹¹ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). 1 Co 15:58.