

Sermon for April 20, 2014 – Easter Day

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

Theme: **What Does Christ's Resurrection Mean for Us?**

- 1) *It means our past has been forgiven.*
- 2) *It means our future is made secure.*
- 3) *It means our present has purpose.*

⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers, 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.

Why is Jesus' resurrection so important? I mean, it's great that Jesus rose, but how does this wonderful fact give purpose to the lonely person who is struggling to find his place in this world? How does it help a young man sitting in jail - struggling with immense guilt because he, in a drug infused rage, hurt his infant son? How does Jesus' resurrection help the woman whose doctors have just told her that she will suffer a slow and agonizing death due to pancreatic cancer, and there is nothing they can do about it? What relevancy does Jesus' resurrection have for these and the countless other problems people face in this world?

Well, let us find the answers to these questions this morning, under the theme: **What Does Christ's Resurrection Mean for us?** *It means that: 1) our past has been forgiven, 2) our future is made secure, and 3) our present has purpose.*

Part One: Our past has been forgiven.

Why do people die? Our sermon text answers that great question, when it says: *Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.* In another place, the Bible says: *The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).* And what is sin? Sin is basically breaking God's law, as the Bible says: *Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4).*

So, the reason everybody dies is because everybody sins – everybody breaks God's holy law. Now someone might say: "I have never dealt drugs or murdered anyone. I never stole anything. I try to speak well of everyone, and help when I can. . . I'm a pretty good person, so how can you say I am a sinner and deserve to die?" The fact of the matter is, no matter how good a person you are, you still have sinned. You see God does not only demand good deeds, he demands perfect deeds, words, and thoughts. Even if you have only sinned once, you have fallen completely.

Let me illustrate what I mean: Imagine you are boating, and your anchor is on a long chain. If a link in the chain breaks as you pull up the anchor; where will your anchor end up? At the bottom of the lake! It doesn't matter how good the rest of the chain is, one bad link ruins the whole chain. The same is true with God's law, as the Bible says: *whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it (James 2:10).*

Now is there anyone here who can honestly say that they have not sinned even once, that you never had a sinful thought about anyone or anything? No, we all have. "Does this mean that if I just sinned once, God would damn me to hell?" According to God's perfect justice: yes, this is what all people deserve.

“But that is so unfair. There are far worse people than me. I don’t deserve this. How can God be so cruel, etc. . .” Friend, God does not compare you to others, but to himself. God is holy and holiness repels sin faster than water repels oil. God cannot tolerate any sin in His presence. As our perfect Creator, He can do what he wants, and is absolutely justified if he condemned us for sin, *but*, before we start calling God names, let us learn something else: God does not want us to suffer eternal death in hell. He wants us to have eternal life, and this is why he did something to save us.

So, how did God solve our problem? By sending his Son to take on human flesh and live the perfect life we all failed to live. The Bible also says: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* (2Co 5:21) In other words Jesus, who had no sin, took all sins upon himself to such a degree that it seemed as if Jesus were sin personified, and went to the cross to be punished as if he committed every single one of them! Jesus died for our sins. God’s holy justice was appeased and we can now be at peace with God. How do we know? Because Jesus rose from the dead! It would have been impossible for Jesus to rise from the dead, unless he had paid for all sin in full. This is why St. Paul says: *“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”*⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.*⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Jesus’ resurrection proves that He has fulfilled for us all the righteous requirements the law demanded. His resurrection proves that our sins have been paid for in full.

But how does this help a person struggling with immense guilt? I will tell you using a real life example. I met a person who, in a moment of drug infused anger, hurt his infant child. He sat in jail, devastated by what he did. How he wished he could have erased that horrible day. He felt forsaken by his family – and who could blame them after what he did? He hurt his own child. He wondered how God could ever forgive him.

What comfort does Christ’s resurrection give this man? Christ paid for his sin. He rose again to prove it. Because of this fact the man, as he turned to the Lord in genuine repentance and faith, could be comforted by the fact that, even though the world will not forgive him, God forgives him. He was at peace with God.

The same is true for us: if we ever feel like we have gone too far – that our sins are too horrible to be forgiven, remember Christ’s resurrection and what it means: that all our sins have been paid for in full. We can turn to God in repentance and faith knowing that He forgives us for Christ sake. We don’t have to live in guilt and terror any longer. Jesus’ resurrection means that our past has been forgiven, and that our future is made secure.

Part Two: Our Future is made secure

I have the privilege of ministering to people who are dying. Yes, you heard me right; I call this a privilege and not a burden, because my faith is often times strengthened by the Christians I visit as I see how they face their future.

I remember a woman who had pancreatic cancer. The doctors told her that she would have to face a slow and agonizing death. I watched as she became weaker and weaker. She was given morphine as if it were water. As the day of her death approached, we spent plenty of time together – talking about how Jesus forgave her past sins, especially the ones she still regretted from her youth. We talked about heaven and the fact that, because Jesus rose from the grave, she too will rise on the last day.

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Jesus saved, not only our souls, but our bodies as well. And this is why he promises to raise all the dead on the last day, and transform all believers into His glorious likeness.

Almost every Christian has wondered at one time or another: "What will we look like in heaven?" The Bible says that we will be raised with our very own bodies – so we will look like ourselves, with one exception: our bodies will be imperishable and immortal. The curse of sin – decay, aging, weakness, disease and death - all of these will be gone. What will our bodies be like? They will be like Jesus' body, as the Scriptures say: *the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:20-21).*

How does Christ's resurrection comfort the Christian with cancer, whose body is falling apart? Because Jesus rose from the dead, she can know that her future is secure: that she too will rise from the dead on the last day, with a glorified body. She, who is bed ridden and in so much pain, will jump, sing and dance - all without disease, pain or decay. The best part is that she will be with her Savior and see him face to face. And this comfort holds true for all of us who hold on to Jesus in faith: because Jesus rose from the dead, so will we.

Part Three: Our present has purpose

If there is one thing people crave its purpose. Isn't the age old question: "What is the meaning of life?" People who are depressed often feel like their life has no meaning or purpose. But Christ's resurrection gives our lives purpose. And when my life has purpose, it is much easier for me to cope with any depression or problems that life might throw my way.

How does Christ's resurrection give our lives purpose and meaning? Here's how: If Jesus has saved me from my sins and has given me the hope of eternal life, and if people only receive this gift through faith in Christ Jesus, then my purpose in life is this: to grow in faith and to tell others about Jesus so they too can be saved.

There you have it: we have just answered one of life's hardest questions! The meaning of life is to trust in Jesus. Your purpose in life is to glorify God and share the good news of Jesus with others.

But sometimes it's hard to do. People don't want to hear that they are sinful. They do not want to believe they need a Savior. The drug of material wealth has numbed our society into spiritual complacency. People view prayer and Bible study like calling 911 – you only do it in an emergency.

And so we wonder: Why aren't they listening? Is it me? Maybe all the time and labor I dedicate to the congregation is in vain because the "same old, same old" is happening. Maybe I should just give up.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, who faithfully do so many things for the Lord and His people: remember what Paul says: *my dear brothers, 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.*

And why is our labor not in vain? Because Jesus rose from the dead. The message we believe is true: forgiveness and life are ours through faith in Christ Jesus. And God promises to work through us as we confess him with our words and actions. He promises to help us grow in faith as we study his word. Jesus

is the meaning of our life. The success of our work is not found in who or how many believe our message, but it is found in our faithfulness to grow in faith and tell others about Jesus. This is why our work is not in vain, because, no matter how many or how few listen to our witness, God finds joy in our faithfulness to Him and His will of sharing the Gospel.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: do you see the relevancy and meaning Christ's resurrection has for your life? Because Christ rose, you can be certain that your sins are forgiven. Because Christ rose, you can be certain that eternal life is yours. Because Christ rose, you can be certain that your work for him is not in vain. Amen.