

5 Epiphany Year C

2/6/2022

Isaiah 6:1-13; Psalm 138; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

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Today our lectionary introduces us to one of the most profound chapters in all of scripture...

St. Paul's theological defense and hope of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It is 1 Corinthians chapter 15...

And we will be in this chapter for three weeks.

So today we start a 3-week series on the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus and our future bodily resurrection.

Our text nears the end of this letter of Paul...

The 15th of sixteen chapters...

1 Corinthians is a letter that makes most modern-day churches look like practically perfect churches.

In the letter St. Paul addresses a litany of problems that are in the local parish of Corinth...

There were divisions in the church based on favorite leaders...

There was sexual immorality...

Lawsuits between church goers...

Marriage struggles...

Disputes over idolatry...

Disputes about the way people dressed at church...

Disputes about communion...

Because some were wealthier than others... there was favoritism...

There was pride among those that seemed more spiritual because they prophesied and spoke in tongues...

There was disorderly worship.

The church had a lot of issues and problems...

St. Paul was speaking right into the life of the church...

Speaking directly to the problems and disputes among the people.

And so, when we get to chapter 15, St. Paul wants to wrap up the letter with one final reminder...

He writes:

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you...

The last bit of exhortation that Paul gives them is a reminder of the gospel... the good news.

You see the gospel is the foundation of our faith.

The Corinthian Church was focusing on a lot of things that were distractions to the gospel.

Some were even contrary to the good news of Jesus.

But Paul wants to remind them of the foundation...

The good news.

St. Paul wrote:

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and then he appeared to more than five hundred of his followers.

This is of first importance!

This is the foundation, the purpose, the hope, of our very faith.

If we lose sight of this, we really lose everything.

Paul wants to be clear that the resurrection is rock-bottom reality for the Christian. ¹

¹ N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: WJK Press, 2003, 2004), 204.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not just something we celebrate on Easter morning...

The cross and the resurrection are the foundation of our entire faith.

The resurrection was an actual event...

Where a man rose from the grave.

This man was both fully human and fully God.

This man was born of a virgin.

This man walked the streets of Palestine...

Teaching and proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

This man healed the sick...

He cast out demons...

This man declared that he was God...

And although tempted as we are...

He never sinned.

This man, Jesus Christ, died for our sins.

He took our place on the cross.

And on the third day of being in the grave he literally rose from that grave... alive again.

With the same body that he had before...

But this time that body had been redeemed, resurrected, renewed.

This is not just some feel good story.

As if we are to just believe in the goodness of the story.

It is the actual events that happened so many years ago.

Without the actual events of the cross and resurrection we have no faith.

We would be as Paul wrote... *believing in vain*.

And here St. Paul is writing to the Corinthians, despite all of their troubles...

He says this is of first importance.

You see we can get caught up in the scandals of our day.

We can get focused on the issues in our church.

We can get so worked up on our agendas, our soap boxes, ...

We have unworthy hills that we would die on...

We can get so charged up about the politics of our day...

We can get so defensive on human sexuality...

We can become so caught up on finances, liturgy, the means of outreach, music, leadership, ... all these things...

And lose focus on the first importance.

It's not that these things don't matter...

They certainly do...

But they are small in comparison of the first importance.

Jesus Christ is the faith of the church.

And what we believe and say about him is of the utmost importance.

On Thursday nights at ABC... our weekly bible study...

We are studying the heretics throughout church history...

And we are only three sessions in...

But just about all the heresies that we are studying bring false ideas about the person of Jesus Christ.

You see what we believe and do with the person Jesus Christ is what our whole faith, our whole religion, our whole being rests on.

If we believe he was just a prophet or a good man our faith is futile...

It is worthless.

Jesus Christ was God in the flesh...

And he died for our sins and rose again victorious from the grave.

You cannot disregard the historical truth and the powerful impact of the cross and the resurrection.

Bishop N. T. Wright shares in his commentary on this chapter:

Christianity, you see, isn't a set of ideas. It isn't a path of spirituality. It isn't a rule of life. It isn't political agenda. It includes, and indeed gives energy to, all those things; but at its very heart it is something different. It is good news about an event which has happened in the world, an event because of which the world can never be the same again. And those who believe it, and live by it, will... never be the same again either. That's what 1 Corinthians 15 is all about.²

1 Corinthians 15 is the theologically rich chapter on the doctrine of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and our future bodily resurrection.

So, as we start this chapter...

I hope that you take great hope in the words you have heard today...

That even though a young church in Corinth...

Just 20 or 30 years removed from the life of Christ...

Who struggled in so many ways...

² Ibid., 206.

Who struggled in their relationship with one another and ultimately in their walk with God...

And yet, St. Paul reminds them...

Of the first importance.

Our denomination will struggle through theological differences...

Through points of emphasis...

In fact, not just our denomination...

The whole church...

The one holy catholic and apostolic church...

Will sway and move...

And strive with and through our points of difference.

Even in our own church...

Here at St. Edward's...

There is going to be some person here...

Or even a group of people...

That just rub you the wrong way.

There are going to be people here that don't fit your theological paradigm.

Yes, we strive to follow the law...

By God's grace and by the power of the Holy Spirit...

But we won't agree on all the points of interpretation.

And yet....

And yet...

May we heed the words of St. Paul...

And *hold firmly to the message* we have received...

The first importance...

We worship Jesus Christ our Lord who died for our sins, was buried, and raised on the third day... all of this in accordance with the scriptures.

This is why we gather on Sundays...

This being the Lord's Day...

The day, very early in the morning, Jesus Christ rose from the grave.

And just as the early church did...

We gather together...

To worship the risen King...

Jesus Christ...

The Savior of the world.

So today...

May we worship Jesus Christ...

The redeemer of the world.

Who was, and is, and is to come.

Amen.