

6 Epiphany Year C

2/13/2022

Jeremiah 17:5-10; Psalm 1; 1 Corinthians 15:12-34; Luke 6:17-26

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Last week in our introductory verses to 1 Corinthians 15...

A chapter on the importance of the Resurrection...

We heard St. Paul describe the cross and the resurrection as the first importance.

In today's reading St. Paul goes on to describe why the resurrection is of so much importance to our faith, our belief, our hope.

In fact, he talks about two resurrections...

When Jesus rose from the grave...

And our own future resurrection.

We affirm both in the Nicene Creed.

Of Jesus we say:

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.

Of our own resurrection as believers in Jesus Christ we say:

We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Now concerning the resurrection...

St. Paul recognizes that some in the Corinthian Church doubt the resurrection...

He writes:

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

So why did some in Corinth question the resurrection?

One of those reasons why life after death was denied is that it made no sense within their surrounding worldview... their culture.

Many believed that after life there was nothing...

Some believed that after death there was a spiritual existence outside of the body... a platonic understanding of life...

where the physical world is evil and the spirit world is good.

But St. Paul here is saying both are wrong.

The bodily resurrection is the foundation of the Christian movement...

The counterculture.

Much of our western post-enlightenment culture does not give serious thought or room to life after death...

If anything, the idea is to help people feel better about their loved ones who have died.

In turn, the rejection of life after death, leads us in our cultural worldview to focus on the life of now...

A form of epicureanism...

A life of pleasure.

And we see that all over our consumerist culture...

Live for now...

Live for what pleases you...

No matter the cost.

Which Paul recognizes in his culture too.

He says:

If the dead are not raised,

*“Let us eat and drink,
for tomorrow we die.”*

If there is no life after death... then there is no need for the resurrection of our Lord.

Perhaps that is why it has become vogue in certain circles...

Even in parts of our own denomination...

To downplay the actual resurrection...

Some have suggested that it is believing in the idea of the risen Lord...

Not the actual physical resurrection...

As if the resurrection of Jesus was some mental spiritual exercise to help us get through the corrupt morals of our world.

But St. Paul says otherwise.

He says that without the resurrection of Jesus there is no hope for us either.

Our faith becomes a religion of morals...

Which was not the intention of our Lord Jesus...

His suffering and death on the cross was not to merely to teach us morals.

Nor was this the intention of the early church...

In the confession of Jesus Christ crucified and raised again...

Calling him the risen Lord...

To their suffering and martyrdom.

It is the truth that our faith is built on a person...

Jesus Christ.

It is built on his physical existence...

God becoming man...

And this man dying for our sins...

The righteous for the unrighteous.

And the hope of eternal life rests on the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus is...

the first fruits of our own future resurrection.

As St. Paul writes:

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

In this way, just as sin entered the world through one man – that is Adam... which brought death.

So, life comes to us through one man – that is Jesus Christ.

To deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is to choose heresy over the teaching of the church.

We Protestants have so embraced tolerance of all beliefs that we can hardly recognize heresy when we see it.

Too many of us agree with the old truism of our secular society:

"It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere."

That truism is a lie which is as dangerous to the church as cancer is to a physical body.

What do we Christians believe about resurrection?

Again... We say it every Sunday:

On the third day he rose again...

There is something about the desire for eternity that is written on all of our hearts.

Go to any society on earth, however primitive, and you will find a yearning for eternal life.

Surely God must have planted that hope in the hearts of people.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 states God has "set eternity in the human heart."

In every human soul is a God-given awareness that there is "something more" than this transient world.

The worldwide yearning for eternity is based on an idea God planted deep within human minds.

Paul didn't say Jesus had risen in theory...

or in figurative terms

or in symbolic fashion...

Paul said, "In fact, Christ has been raised from the dead."

Some people even have eternal hopes etched onto their tombstones, like the woman whose tombstone bore this message:

She lived 42 years with her husband and died in hopes of a better life.

Our resurrection is based on the resurrection of our Lord Jesus.

Our hope is in Jesus' work and glory.

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, you have the defeat of death.

In our future resurrection you have the defeat of death because of the blood of Jesus Christ.

And that is our hope.

That sin and death will be removed forever because all things including our bodies will be made new...

A remaking...

A redeeming of creation.

In all of Jewish and Christian thinking, spirituality, and hope... one thing that remains central...

Death is the enemy.¹

As Bishop N. T. Wright proclaims:

Death being the enemy is blindingly obvious to anyone who has recently been bereaved.... To say that death is anything other than an enemy is to deny the goodness, beauty, and power of God's good creation.

And the point of resurrection is that it is the defeat of death.

It isn't a way of saying that death isn't so bad after all....

...since death is the unmaking of God's creation, resurrection will be its remaking.

*That, and nothing less, is the Christian hope.*²

¹ NT Wright, *Paul For Everyone 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: WJK, 2003, 2004), 214.

² *Ibid.*, 214-215.

Next week... we will finish this 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians...

We will explore what the resurrected body will be like and what this means for the hope that we live.

Last week we talked about the first importance of the cross and the resurrection...

The lesson today is this:

That because Jesus Christ physically rose from the grave for those that believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior we too will rise from the grave.

Death is not the final sentence.

Death has been defeated.

And that is the message of our Christian hope.

And it all comes down to the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.