

Sermon for April 27, 2025 – Easter 2

1 Corinthians 15:12-20 (EHV)

Theme: The Resurrection of the Dead:

- 1) We are pitiful without it.
- 2) We are privileged because of it.

¹²Now if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how is it that some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is pointless, and your faith is pointless too. ¹⁵Then we are even guilty of giving false testimony about God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise, if it were true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then it also follows that those who fell asleep in Christ perished. ¹⁹If our hope in Christ applies only to this life, we are the most pitiful people of all. ²⁰But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Last week, we celebrated Jesus' resurrection: the capstone of the Christian faith, without which our entire hope would fall apart.

Sadly, many people question whether Jesus actually rose from the dead. They call it a myth fabricated by the early church. Some even claim that Christians don't have to believe in the resurrection. For example, one progressive pastor wrote that it is absurd for present-day Christians to believe that Jesus' corpse physically rose from the dead.ⁱ She insinuates that the only resurrection we need to believe in is Jesus' love being resurrected in our fight for social justice.

Is that true? Absolutely not! And don't just take my word for it, consider what the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write about such things, under the theme: **The Resurrection of the Dead:** 1) We are pitiful without it. 2) We are privileged because of it.

Part One: The Resurrection of the Dead: We are pitiful without it.

Our sermon text is part of a much longer section that the Apostle Paul wrote to Christians in Corinth regarding the resurrection. In the Greco-Roman world, the idea of a person rising from the dead was considered absurd. The prevailing philosophies of that time taught that the physical body was flawed, a shackle from which the soul sought to escape to unite with the divine. Therefore, they scoffed at the idea of a bodily resurrection, especially since they had never heard of such a thing happening until people began talking about Jesus.

The Christians in Corinth were not immune to mockery from the unbelieving world around them. By God's grace, they accepted the fact that Jesus rose from the dead. "But maybe," they thought, "he was the exception. Maybe believing in a general resurrection from the dead is unnecessary, so

long as we just believe Jesus rose from the dead. I mean, isn't it good enough that believers' souls go to heaven after they die? Why, then, would our bodies need to rise?"

The Apostle Paul understood the danger of such thinking. God did not "create" us to be bodiless spirits like the angels. Still worse, any attack on the promise of a general resurrection would inevitably call Jesus' resurrection into question.

Therefore, Paul asked the Corinthian Christians: *¹²Now if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how is it that some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*

Paul's point is simple: you cannot believe that Christ rose from the dead and think that there is no such thing as rising from the dead. That would be like saying, "The Wright brothers successfully flew an airplane, but airplanes have never and will never exist." Such a statement contradicts itself and is absurd. Therefore, Paul writes:

¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is pointless, and your faith is pointless too.

Why would the Christian faith be pointless if there is no resurrection from the dead? Because, without a resurrection, there is no future for us after death. And with no future, our present lives become meaningless. Nothing we believe or do would matter.

Paul continues: *¹⁵Then we are even guilty of giving false testimony about God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise, if it were true that the dead are not raised.*

Even a cursory read through the New Testament reveals how essential Jesus' resurrection is to Christianity. Everything depends on it. But if the dead are not raised, then the apostles would have been nothing more than a bunch of liars and blasphemers. They would be the most pitiful con-artists that ever existed because at least real con-artists get some sort of material gain from their lies. But the apostles received no such benefit. They were persecuted and martyred for preaching that Christ rose from the dead. What a pitiful return if everything they said was a lie.

¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

No resurrection means no forgiveness. Why? Because the wages of sin is death.ⁱⁱ Therefore, if Christ had not risen from the dead, there would be no proof of our forgiveness, reconciliation with God, or hope of everlasting life. The guilt of our sins would hang over us like a death sentence.

¹⁸Then it also follows that those who fell asleep in Christ perished.

Could you imagine what it would be like to hear me preach at every Christian funeral, "He is lost, she is damned, and they are in hell."? If Christ did not rise from the dead, that would be our reality! Imagine having no hope of everlasting life with God in paradise to comfort you as you lay dying. Imagine facing the prospect of an everlasting future with everyone in hell, where the Bible says,

“their worm will not die, and their fire will not be quenched, and all flesh will be horrified by them.”ⁱⁱⁱ No wonder the Apostle Paul says:

¹⁹If our hope in Christ applies only to this life, we are the most pitiful people of all.

Why would Christians be the most pitiful of all people? Because at least worldly-minded people would get some temporary pleasure out of this life. They live under the theme: eat and drink for tomorrow we die. Christians, on the other hand, would get nothing. All their self-denial, charity, putting others ahead of self, turning the other cheek, patiently enduring persecution, and giving up life for the sake of Christ’s kingdom would be for nothing. To say that Christians would be most pitiful if there were no resurrection of the dead is an understatement of the highest proportions. Could you imagine anything more hopeless?

Part Two: The Resurrection of the Dead: We are privileged because of it.

Thanks to God, we are not without hope, as the Apostle Paul confidently asserts:

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

Christ’s resurrection is a fact. Shortly before our sermon text, the apostle lists numerous eyewitnesses who saw the resurrected Saviour at various times and places. There are so many that Lee Strobel, a former atheist turned Christian, stated that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best-attested event of the ancient world.

Not only did Jesus rise from the dead, but Paul says that He rose for a purpose: to serve as *the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*.

Let me explain what that phrase means with an illustration: As the late April snow began to melt in Barrhaven, my family began to see wildflowers budding in the park. They were spring’s “firstfruits” – spring’s first signs that the barren ground would soon be covered with living plants and flowers. Similarly, Christ’s empty tomb is the first sign that the day is soon coming when every tomb on this earth will burst open, and every Christian’s body will be raised to live in the new, perfect paradise that Jesus will create at His reappearing!

Oh, how privileged we are that Christ rose from the dead! How so? Because it proves that our faith is not futile. Not only do we have a glorious future in Christ, but our present lives also have real purpose and meaning.

Jesus’ resurrection proves that the Gospel the apostles preached is true: He has reconciled us to God. Our sins are forgiven. Through faith in Him, God gives us everlasting life as a gift. We are at peace with God.

This means that those who have died in Christ are not really dead, but asleep. As their bodies rest in the earth, we can be confident that their souls are together with Jesus in paradise, just as He

promised the repentant thief who died with Him on the cross.^{iv} More than that, when the last day comes, Jesus will awaken them, breathing new life into their corpses so they can live with Him forever in the perfect paradise^v that He promises to grant believers on that day.

Because Jesus rose from the dead, we believe all of God's promises are true. God the Father has adopted us as His dearly loved sons and daughters through Holy Baptism. Even though we might have to suffer many evils on this earth for His name's sake, He nevertheless loves us, promising to send His angels to watch over us and work in all things for our good.

Yes, because Jesus lives, our lives take on new meaning and purpose: to share the message of God's saving love with the world. The apostle Paul wrote: *For the love of Christ compels us, because we came to this conclusion: One died for all; therefore, all died. ¹⁵And he died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves but for him, who died in their place and was raised again.*^{vi}

At the beginning of this sermon, I mentioned how some progressive Christians claim that it doesn't matter if Jesus rose bodily from the grave. They argue that the only thing that matters is that we spiritually resurrect ourselves to love others. However, this is utterly foolish. It is only because Jesus physically rose from the dead that we are able to love others as Jesus loved us. It is only because Jesus physically rose from the dead that we have a message of hope and peace to offer the world from God that surpasses anything it could imagine.

What is that message? That *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*^{vii} Therefore, we urge our unbelieving family friends and neighbours to be reconciled to God by repenting of their sins and trusting in Jesus for forgiveness. And what a privilege it is to share that message with them! How so? Because Jesus promises " ²⁴*Amen, Amen, I tell you: Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He is not going to come into judgment but has crossed over from death to life.* "

Yes, we Christians certainly have a meaningful message to share with the world: Jesus rose from the dead. Oh, how pitiful we would be without this truth – hopelessly lost to a meaningless existence that would only end in despair and death. But, oh, how privileged we are because of this truth. Because He lives, we too shall live – to His glory now on this earth, and with Him in glory forever in paradise. Amen.

ⁱ Progressive Pastor Dawn Hutchings

ⁱⁱ Cf. Romans 6:23

ⁱⁱⁱ Isaiah 66:24

^{iv} Cf. Luke 23:43

^v Cf. 2 Peter 3:13

^{vi} 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

^{vii} John 3 16