

HOPELESS IN ADAM, RESTORED HOPE BY CHRIST**1 Corinthians 15:12-23**

Intro: One year ago, on this second Sunday of March we didn't meet in this room. We met, for our very first time, on ZOOM. We didn't know what would happen with this thing called the Coronavirus or, as some were starting to refer to it, COVID -19. We were confused. They told us we needed two weeks to flatten the curve. That description went by the wayside pretty quick. The infections never got out of control in the way experts predicted, but infections happened and we hunkered down. Initially, we cancelled services for two weeks with the promise to ourselves to reexamine it. Then, we just hoped we could meet by Easter which was a month away. Then, we hoped for Mother's Day, and then we just gave up and waited, and waited, and waited. And now, here we are, still separated from so many we miss seeing from week to week. We miss hugs. We miss fellowshiping around the DinnerChurch dinner table. We miss each other. But we never lost hope.

Our hope is not in meeting.

Our hope is not in DinnerChurch

Our hope is not in human solutions.

Our hope is in Jesus Christ.

*Our hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus's blood and righteousness;
We dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.*

*On Christ, the solid Rock, we stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,*

All other ground is sinking sand.

We can't deny though, that the temptation to slip into hopelessness has been strong. It would not have been surprising and is understandable that any of us have experienced it. It is certain that those with little or no faith in the goodness of God and his promises certainly felt have felt growing helplessness and hopelessness. It's not surprising then that as isolation continued, despair set in and suicide has come to rival COVID as yet another unnecessary cause of death.

But, trials or no trials, the answer to hopelessness is Jesus Christ and the hope we have in his resurrection. We take great joy in that resurrection because it promises our own. Hopelessness came because of the disobedience and sin of the first man, Adam, and hope was restored by work of the obedient and sinless son of man, Jesus. Death came by Adam; eternal life came through the victory over death by Jesus Christ.

That is the point Paul is making in our text for today. Listen"

(Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-23)

We've gotten the definite idea in our study over the past eight months that the Corinthians were the princes of pushback. We see that here, as it is obvious that some Corinthian Christians have questioned the resurrection of believers. These questions came from two sources:

One source was that there were a number of them who were Jewish, and Judaism was divided regarding the issue of resurrection. The Old Testament speaks of Sheol as the place of the dead—a place where those who have died are separated from the living and from God. Early on, you can see it from time to time in the Psalms, but in other places too, Sheol was the grave, and when you died, and that was it. As time went on, a growing understanding of resurrection developed and there are numerous allusions to it. By the time of Jesus's ministry it was a big controversy that Jesus sometimes used effectively to confront religious leaders. The Sadducees were a prevalent party who denied any possibility of resurrection or life after death. The other main party, the Pharisees strongly believed in the resurrection of the dead. Paul was from the Pharisees so he had always believed in the resurrection, but it was solidified by the fact he had actually met the risen Jesus on the Damascus road.

The other source of pushback, and a larger group of Corinthian Christians, were those from a Greek background. If Greeks believed in life after death, it was not from a bodily resurrection. For them, the body was something to leave behind gladly—good riddance! Their focus was the preservation of the soul and this was NOT a scriptural concept.

Paul taught the Jewish and also Christian concept of the wholeness of the person—body and soul. The resurrection of Jesus and then of his followers is foundational to Paul’s teaching and to our faith. A good place to start in that teaching is . . .

Jesus didn’t raise – he was raised

- God did it! That’s the point of verse 12 in our text: God did it for Jesus and he will do it for us as well. It’s plain and simple, if you believe in Christ’s bodily resurrection, then you cannot say that there is no resurrection of the dead.
- But, think about it, if Jesus was not raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith also is in vain (v. 14). If that’s the case then millions, if not billions of Christians, for the past 2000 years have been spinning their wheels and dying for nothing. But God had a plan when he raised his son from the dead and he has the same plan for us. But if the foundational idea of the faith, the bodily resurrection of Jesus first, and then all who call upon his name; is denied, everything thing else falls apart too. Our message would be false and . . .

We would be false witnesses

- In other words, liars. Lying is sin. It’s in the BIG TEN - The ninth commandment is *You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor*. Exodus 20:16. To bear witness to a resurrection that didn’t and will never occur would be a lie of the hugest proportions. To promulgate a lie about such a message of hope would be the ultimate in hateful cynicism.
- To show how awful that would be Paul goes into a litany of “how can I count the ways?”
 - *But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.* (v. 15) If Jesus isn’t raised, we won’t be raised. No hope!
 - *For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.* (v. 16) It’s logical and the reasoning easily follows. No hope!
 - *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.* (v. 17). We have been fooled and we are totally wasting our time!
 - *Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.* (v. 18). Now that hurts!!! After all these promises we hoped to see them again. We hoped it wasn’t the end!
 - And here is what it all comes down to: *If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.* (v. 19). An entire section of humanity for an entire portion of history, and a huge portion of history at that, have been tragically mistaken. How sad!
- People who believe in a lie invariably end up the worse for it. All of us can share examples of it. But in the case of the resurrection, it’s not a lie! We are not false witnesses! We saw that last week. If you are a Christ Follower you have seen the proofs from the word of God. We can joyfully say we are not to be pitied. It’s not a lie. . .

The RESURRECTION is true!

- Paul gleefully pushes back at the deniers with, *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead*, (20a). It’s not a myth! It’s a fact.
- In the great holy harvest begun on Easter day Jesus *became the first fruits of those who are asleep* (v. 20b). In Old Testament law the requirement for Israel was to offer their “firstfruits” to the Lord. This was the first of their harvest and from their flocks.
 - Think of it like this: I love a good tomato. Kathy has been buying pretty good tomatoes lately at Aldi, but the best winter tomato comes up way short of that first tomato from our own garden in late July or early August. We also wait with great anticipation for the first fresh peaches and apples each summer. Fruit from Chile or New Zealand is wonderful, but that first apple or peach from the local orchard in summertime is the best. The first is the best.
 - The Israelites brought their first grain to the temple and it was roasted and husked (I was interested that it was husked after the roasting) and then it was ground into a flour and a special bread was made with it. Just the description of it is tantalizing. The first fruit brought the promise of abundance and anticipation.

- Jesus is the best and he was raised first as the spiritual firstfruits. He was the perfect sacrifice. Richard Donovan says, “*But the joy of the “first fruits” is not just in the eating of fresh fruit for the first time in months. The real joy of the “first fruits” is that the privation of winter has come to an end. The “first fruits” signal the abundance of fruit that people can expect to eat in months to come. They signal that there are good days ahead. When Paul says that the resurrected Christ is “the first fruits of those who are asleep,” he is telling these Corinthian Christians that Christ’s resurrection is just the beginning. His resurrection signals the abundance of resurrections yet to come—the resurrection of all those who have placed their faith in Christ.*” But wait there’s more!

- The resurrection is the abundance of the harvest. It’s a new future . . .

Hopeless in Adam, Endless Hope in Christ

- Adam lived as a representative of others. His obedience would have meant life for others right from the beginning of Creation. Instead, his disobedience meant death for others. And who did Adam represent? He represented all who descended from him – that’s everyone. To be born into this world is to be born from Adam – there’s no other way around it. Being from Adam is to be dead in trespasses and sins – at least that’s the way Paul put it in another letter, *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins* Ephesians 2:1
- Fortunately, Christ also lived (and died and rose again) as a representative for others. And who did Christ represent in his life, death burial and resurrection? Our text in my translation says *But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.* 1 Corinthians 15:23 (NIV). Now some have taken this to imply a universal salvation – even for those who do not believe. That flies in the face of Biblical teaching. But it does mean, all who call upon his name will enjoy the resurrection. But here is the promise, *If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.”* Romans 10:9-11. So, Paul’s words here, *those who belong to him* are all who ever have and ever will place their faith in Jesus Christ. To be in Christ is to have life everlasting. *In Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.* 1 Corinthians 15:22. That’s the truth! Hopeless in Adam, hope restored in Jesus Christ! Amen.