

CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD
Sermon for the 6th Sunday after the Epiphany, 2022
1 Corinthians 15:1-20

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Second Reading from before, 1 Corinthians 15:1-20: **My fellow-Christians, I am telling you the Good News that I told you, which you also received and on which you also stand.** ² You are also saved by it if you cling to the Word that I have preached to you, unless you have become believers in vain. ³ For I delivered to you, first, what I also received: that Christ died for our sins as the Scriptures said He would, ⁴ and that He was buried and that He was raised again on the third day as the Scriptures said He would, ⁵ and that He appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, He appeared to more than five hundred Christians at the same time, most of whom are still living, but some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then He appeared to James and then to all the apostles, ⁸ and, last of all, He appeared to me also, as to someone abnormally born. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not deserve to be called an apostle, because I had been persecuting the church of God. ¹⁰ However, by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me has not been without effect; but I have worked harder than all the others have — yet not I, but the grace of God, which has been with me. ¹¹ Now, whether I have done it or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you have believed.

¹² If it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁴ If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is useless, and your faith is also useless. ¹⁵ We are also found to be false witnesses of God, because we have testified about God that He has raised Christ; but He did not raise Him if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For, if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. You are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished. ¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all other people. ²⁰ However, now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“**Christ has been raised from the dead.**” Everything depends on this. Our faith, our forgiveness, our future - our eternal future. The future of our loved ones who have died in the Lord. Everything hinges on this great and glorious fact that “**Christ has been raised from the dead.**”

But what if Christ *had not* been raised from the dead? What then? What would be the consequences? As you know, not everyone believes that Christ has been raised from the dead, and for us who do believe, what if our faith is misplaced? What if it never really happened? What if this is nothing more than just a big made-up story? Or what if we are just misunderstanding the idea that “**Christ has been raised from the dead**”? Maybe these words just mean that He kind of rose spiritually, but not bodily, as in, His memory lives on because of the great moral example that He set, the nice teachings that He set forth about loving one another, and so on.

Sadly, this is what a lot of people think about Jesus. They will say that He was a good moral teacher, the same as many other names of history such as Confucius or the Dalai Lama. Jesus set a fine example and died unjustly, but that was it. His body must be somewhere. For surely there is no such thing as a real, physical resurrection of the dead!

This way of thinking is nothing new. People thought this way back in the first century, and this idea had even infiltrated the early Christian church. There is no such thing as a bodily resurrection of the dead. It was apparently the thinking of some people in the church in Corinth, too, because the apostle Paul takes on this notion and contemplates the consequences of it if that were the case. That’s what’s going on in our reading for today. Paul writes, “**If Christ has not been raised.**” This is a hypothetical that Paul is setting forth, for the truth of the matter is quite the opposite. Paul wanted the Corinthians - and us - to consider *just what would follow* if it were true that Christ had not been raised from the dead.

So he starts from the other way around. Paul writes, “**If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ has not been raised either.**” What if there were no resurrection of the dead in store for believers who have died? Well, if that’s the case, that there is no such thing as a bodily resurrection, then it follows that Christ Himself has not risen, and if that, in turn, is true, then everything falls apart. The whole Christian message becomes meaningless and false “**if Christ has not been raised.**”

Let's track this along with Paul. He says, **"If it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"** You see, Paul had proclaimed very clearly that Christ Jesus had been raised bodily and had reminded the Corinthians of his previous preaching to them: **"¹ My fellow-Christians, I am telling you the Good News that I told you, which you also received and on which you also stand. ² You are also saved by it if you cling to the Word that I have preached to you, unless you have become believers in vain. ³ For I delivered to you, first, what I also received: that Christ died for our sins as the Scriptures said He would, ⁴ and that He was buried and that He was raised again on the third day as the Scriptures said He would,"** and so on, recounting the various resurrection appearances that the risen Lord had made to many witnesses.

Paul is saying that the *physical* death and the *physical* resurrection of Christ is of the first importance to the Christian gospel. It is indispensable and essential; the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is absolutely central to everything we believe and hope for. It is the cornerstone of our salvation. When that doctrine is lost, the entire message of salvation is lost. When we deny one doctrine of Scripture, we shall also deny other doctrines of Scripture as well, for Scripture is a web of truth. So if this is what Paul had preached to the Corinthians, how could some of them now say that there was no such thing as the resurrection of the dead?

Now, they may not have been saying this about Christ Himself. But they were saying it about the Christians from their church who died. They thought they would not be raised bodily, that a physical resurrection was impossible. They were reflecting the typical pagan Greek attitude toward the doctrine of the resurrection: *"when the dust has drunk the blood of man, and he's once dead, there's no uprising."*¹ In Athens, some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers had also expressed the same unbelief when they derided Paul's message of Christ's resurrection when they had asked, *"What might this scrap-collector want to say?"* (Acts 17:18). By this, they meant Paul was an empty talker, a babbler who didn't know what he was talking about.

However, Paul was reminding the Corinthian Christians that if they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, then they were subverting the very gospel he had preached to them because to be consistent, they would then also have to say that Christ Himself was not raised, and if they do that, then they are undermining the entire Christian message.

These two things hang together. The bodily resurrection of Christians, which will happen on the day when Christ returns, and the bodily resurrection of Christ Himself, which happened on the first Easter Day, go together and are *inseparably linked.*

Here's how Paul puts it: **"If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ has not been raised either."** What else follows from that? Paul tells us: **"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. You are still in your sins ¹⁸ Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished. ¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all other people."**

If Christ has not been raised, then our faith is in vain. It's empty; it's futile. What's the point? For in that case, not only would there be no hope for anyone after death, but there would not even be forgiveness for sins right now. It would mean that Jesus was just a man who died unfairly, but that's all. There is nothing for us. It would mean that God did not accept the death of His Son as the sacrifice for our sin. Sin produces death, and if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then sin has not been dealt with. Therefore, we would be still stuck in our sins, and God would be against us. And as the writer to the Hebrews warns, *"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* (Heb. 10:31). Without the resurrection of Christ, the whole gospel falls apart.

"If Christ has not been raised," then those Christians who have died - there's nothing for them, either. They have perished, died eternally. End of story. Pretty hopeless.

And what a joke, what fools, we Christians are shown to be! **"We are to be pitied more than all other people."** Why are we putting up with all the deprivation and even persecution that Christians have to endure if all we are doing is having a faith that doesn't last, that is not powerful enough to overcome the grave? What a weak serving of thin gruel we have been fed! This life is full of sorrow and tears, and if a "resurrection-less" Christianity is all we have, what a pitiful bunch we are! If all you're having is your best life now - a life that, no matter how successful and prosperous you are, is still full of tears and loss and ends in death - if all you have is your best life now, well, there's not much to look forward to then, is there?

However, the good news is that *we are not having our best life now.* Our best life *is still to come!* Why? Because Christ has indeed been raised from the dead! And here is where Paul makes the shift into high gear: **"However, now Christ has**

¹ Aeschylus, Greek dramatist.

been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Christ has been raised from the dead! It’s a fact! It means that this life is not all there is! The best is yet to come! Christ is **“the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”** This means that there are more to follow. His resurrection guarantees the resurrection of those who trust in Him. And **“those who have fallen asleep”** means those Christians who have already died, trusting in their Lord. Christ’s resurrection is just the first-fruits. There are lots more who will be raised, bodily, when Christ comes again.

Dear friends here is our hope! Here is hope that we can have for our friends and loved ones who have died in the Lord. We shall be raised; they will be raised, imperishable, at Christ’s return. The trumpet will sound, and we shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye.² Christ will call forth our dead bodies from the grave, just like He called forth Lazarus - just like Christ Himself rose from the dead. As Paul says in Philippians, Christ *“will change our humble bodies and make them like His glorified body, because He has the power by which He can make everything subordinate to Himself”* (Philippians 3:21).

What a prospect that will be! No more sorrow, no more sickness, no more death! Only life and gladness stretching out before us! The whole company of the saints, all who have trusted in God’s promise of salvation through all the centuries - all of us gathered together around our Saviour, to enjoy life as it was meant to be, at peace with God and in fellowship with one another. That will be our best life, and it will last forever! Take hope in this! Take your stand on this, for it is the rock-solid foundation of our faith. Rejoice in the promise of the resurrection, your resurrection, tied inseparably to the resurrection of Christ our Saviour. Because Christ lives, we too shall live. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

EPIPHANY VI

O God our Father, You are our rock and our fortress, our joy and our salvation, our light and our life, our sun and our shield. You are always ready to hear those who come before You. Therefore hear us as we come before You with our prayers and praise.

We thank You that You have called us by Your Spirit to believe in Your Son Jesus Christ, made us citizens of His eternal kingdom, given us righteousness as our dress, and equipped us with power, love, and self-control. Continue to give us these blessings, and fill us with the fruits of faith. Make us living letters that speak of Jesus Christ, that people around us may read of Your mercy and saving power in human lives.

We praise You for Your grace in calling us to work in Your vineyard. Bless our work, witness, and giving, in Your name. Use us to bring many people to Your glory. Make us glad to obey Your great commission, ready to accept every service, eager to perform every duty well, and strong to do every task faithfully. Make us patient and willing even when service in Your kingdom is long and difficult. Give us the joy of seeing others come to worship You, and give us the grace to welcome them warmly as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Keep us all safe in Your loving care, and lead us to the heavenly land of promise. Grant that we may run our daily race by the presence and power of Your Spirit. Give us self-control over everything that could endanger our faith and disqualify us for the prize. Grant that we may seize every opportunity to live the new life. Prevent us from boasting in our own wisdom, wealth, or power. Enable us to glory only in knowing You as our Father. May our only treasure be to possess Your wisdom and power in the life, death, and resurrection of Your Son.

Be with us, dear Father, in all that we do. Strengthen and direct us in our daily work. Protect us in our leisure. Shelter us in our homes. Guide us as we travel. Teach us in our problems. Shield us in our afflictions. Comfort us in our sorrows. Hear us as we pray, and lift up our spirits to You as we worship.

Accept these sacrifices of humble prayer and joyous praise that we offer before You, for the sake of Jesus Christ. And to You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, be all glory and praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

² 1 Corinthians 15:52

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Jeremiah 17:5-8

⁵ This is what the LORD has said: “Cursed is the man who trusts in a human being, who makes flesh his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD! ⁶ He will be like a shrub in the desert and will not see when anything good comes. He will live in the parched places in the wilderness, in a salty land where no one lives. ⁷ Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD! The LORD will be his confidence. ⁸ He will be like a tree planted beside water, which spreads out its roots beside a stream. He will not be afraid when the hot season comes, but his leaves will be green. He will not be anxious in a year of drought or stop producing fruit.”

1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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people. ²⁰ However, now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Luke 6:17-26

¹⁷ Jesus went down with them and stood on a level place with a large crowd of His disciples and a great many people from all over Judea, Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸ They had come to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, and those who were troubled by unclean spirits were made well. ¹⁹ All the people were trying to touch Him, because power was coming from Him and healing them all.

²⁰ Jesus looked at His disciples and said: “Blessed are you who are poor! For yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ “Blessed are you who are hungry now! For you will be satisfied.

“Blessed are you who are weeping now! For you will laugh.

²² “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For, you see, your reward is great in heaven. For that is how their fathers used to treat the prophets.

²⁴ “However, how terrible for you who are rich! For you have already received your comfort.

²⁵ “How terrible for you who are well fed now! For you will be hungry.

“How terrible for you who are laughing now! For you will mourn and weep.

²⁶ “How terrible for you when all people speak well of you! For that is how their fathers used to treat the false prophets.