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## The Resurrection of Our Lord Easter Sunday, 2023

### Sermon 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

Introduction – Easter isn't anything like Christmas. Christmas and Easter are the two big festivals in the Christian Church, but Easter isn't anything like Christmas. Certainly not socially. Nobody goes to Easter parties; you get a breakfast on Easter but that's about it. Certainly not commercially. Easter has a Good Friday but not a Black Friday like Christmas does. No sales or discounts; no black ink for store owners. Not musically, either. People hum Christmas carols not Easter hymns. The timing of Easter doesn't help it much. Christmas kind of lights up the cold days of winter but tulips and daffodils seem more hopeful than Easter. And then there's this: People can get into the baby thing at Christmas; everyone loves babies. But a dead body coming back to life? Not so much. There are books about after death experiences and reincarnation as animals and plants, but not many people buy into that. Even churches struggle with Easter. Maybe the courage of Jesus' disciples was raised; maybe his message of love was raised. No doubt that Jesus was born but that his body was raised? Like I said: Easter isn't anything like Christmas.

None of this bothers us too much. We believe that Jesus actually died on Good Friday and we believe that he actually came back to life on Easter. We believe that his resurrection is the divine guarantee that his life and death in our place took our sins away. *He is risen* is the crown of *It is finished*. We believe that his resurrection assures our resurrection: **Because he lives we will also live.** Easter isn't anything like Christmas—true enough. Without Easter Christmas means nothing. Without Easter Good Friday means nothing. **If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.**

The Christians who lived in the city of Corinth in Bible times were a lot like we are. There were voices back then that challenged the resurrection. There were cynics and skeptics back then just like now. None of this bothered them much. But in St. Paul's first letter to this congregation, his last paragraphs had this objective: **Brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.** That reminder from Paul is what we are going to talk about today. Paul understands what we believe and now he will underscore what we believe:

### **Easter is for Real!**

It had to be for real...It was seen to be for real...It was proclaimed to be for real...It was believed to be for real.

1. Paul spent more than a year and a half in Corinth on his second missionary journey and he taught and preached the good news about Jesus. In this letter he wrote, **By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.** And then he reviewed the basic points: **For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.** Paul didn't learn the gospel from Jesus; he wasn't one of the original disciples. Truth is he hated Jesus and persecuted Jesus' followers. But after Jesus called him and converted him, Paul learned the truth and he learned it as well as any of the twelve—and maybe he explained it better than any of the others. He knew all about the ravages and results of sin. He knew all about God's plan to restore sinners and how God's Son was at the heart of that plan. He knew all about Jesus' obedience to the law and his death on the cross. He knew that **Jesus became sin for us though he knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God through him.** But what Paul knew best was that the whole plan depended on the resurrection. He wrote later in this chapter: **And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.**

**Easter is for real; Easter had to be for real.** Without Easter we have no help, no healing and no hope. But Easter is real. Jesus is alive. The punishment we deserved lasts forever. The punishment Jesus endured came to an end. It was finished. The death we die lasts a long time and ends up in ashes and decay. The death Jesus died was temporary; it lasted for parts of only three days. Our burial traps us. Jesus' burial did not trap him. From the moment his heart began to beat and his lungs began to breathe and his eyes began to see he has dominated our lives with forgiveness and peace and hope. Now there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Now we have peace that transcends all understanding. Now we prepare for a mansion he has prepared for us. Easter isn't like Christmas; Easter isn't like anything! Easter is our tower and our rock and our mountain. We build our faith on Easter.

2. People are right when they say we haven't seen Jesus, not face to face. For those people, that compromises Easter. Seeing is believing, they say. Well, I never saw Abraham Lincoln but thousands of people did. Plenty of people saw Jesus and they saw him alive after he died. Paul wrote, **Jesus appeared to Cephas (that's Peter) and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.** Jesus was everywhere on those days after Easter: the road from the tomb to Jerusalem, the meal in Emmaus, the apostles' hiding place, the shores of the Sea of Galilee, the hills near Bethany where he ascended. Were all these people seeing visions or dreaming dreams? Were they a little off mentally, maybe even insane? But why? Why would they make this up? They had nothing to gain: no money, no power, no prestige. They insisted they saw the living Christ and what did they get? They were expelled from their churches, they were chased by persecutors, and they were thrown into arenas to die. These people were normal people; they lived and loved and laughed just like we do. And they saw Jesus alive with their every own eyes. **Easter is for real: it was seen to be real by real people.**

3. And they shared what they saw with us. Paul wasn't the only one, but he was one of them. He wrote, **I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.** Paul became one of Jesus' sent out men, and he was sent out to the Gentiles, to our ancestors. He traveled on foot and by ship from Arabia to Spain. He endured flogging and prison and stonings and shipwrecks and thorns in the flesh. But his message never changed: **Now is Christ risen from the dead.** And all the rest did the same. **They could not help speaking about what they had seen and heard.** No armies of atheists, no scientific discoveries, no cynical theologians, no personal tragedies, no youthful inexperience, no weaknesses of old age have stopped faithful Christian preachers from preaching and Easter is what they preached. 2,000 years have passed since Jesus came alive in that tomb; 6,000 miles separate us from Joseph's Garden and yet here we are, a little band of Lutherans in Mequon, still greeting each "Christ is arisen. He is risen indeed." **Easter is for real. It is proclaimed to be real.**

4. The moon is not made of green cheese, there is no Santa Claus, and carrots don't make you see better. Children believe those things, immature, silly children. We are not children, we are not silly, and in this congregation, we are very mature. But from the first frilly dress or snap-on tie our mothers made us wear on Easter Sunday, we have believed that Jesus is alive. We have never seen a dead person come back to life; no corpse has ever winked at us from a coffin. But when we pray, we say *Dear Jesus*. When we eat we say *Come, Lord Jesus*. When we sin, we say *Forgive me, Jesus*. When we're hurting, we say *Help me, Jesus*. And when death draws near, we look up to Jesus and believe what he says: **I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. And he who lives and believes in me will never die.** With a miracle we do not understand, Jesus and his Holy Spirit create in us a confidence to believe the impossible and what cannot be. We gained the information about Easter from our parents and teachers, but half the world knows the data of Easter. The miracle of faith does not happen in the recitation of recollections. But trusting in Easter, relying on Easter, living in Easter, that comes from the power of the Word and the sacraments. The miracle here is not that we know about Easter, but that we believe in Easter. **Easter is real and we believe it to be.**

What St. Paul received he has passed on us as of first importance: **Easter is for real!** It had to be real to complete God's plan to save us. It was seen to be real by real people. It has been proclaimed to be real all over the globe, and it is believed to be real by us and by billions more in the miracle of faith. Christ is arisen: He is risen indeed! **Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.** Amen.