

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? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:12-22)

We are Linked to Christ

Do you remember when Facebook came out? The young people among us don't, but we old folks do. It was the cool thing. It started on a college campus and everyone who was really into the latest thing had a Facebook account. Updating your status became the cool thing to do. Then along came Twitter and people were constantly telling their followers where they were and what they were doing. It opened a floodgate of social media sites and services. Today, the cool kids don't use Facebook anymore. Even Twitter is too low key for them. They use Instagram and Pinterest and who knows what else. Well, I'm not really into social media. I have a Facebook page but I almost never post on it. I have a Twitter account, but I haven't tweeted in so long that I don't remember how to do it. Forget Pinterest and Instagram and whatever else is out there. I think they have a filter that keeps dinosaurs like me off of them. The only social media site I do anything with is LinkedIn. I don't spend any significant time there.

What is the purpose of those social media sites? LinkedIn's name says it all: they keep us linked to each other. Obviously, they didn't exist in Jesus' day. But making connections with people is as old as the human race. The greatest connection we need is with our Savior. No matter how many friends you have or don't have, no matter how many social media accounts you juggle, you need to be connected to Christ. That is what Easter is really all about. This morning, St. Paul shows us that **we are linked to Christ.**

I.

Now, that's true in more than one sense. I'm not going to start with our faith in Christ, because St. Paul starts with a different point. **We are linked to Christ. We are linked to his resurrection.** That's true in one sense before we come to faith. To show the linkage that God worked for us, St. Paul begins this morning with a very 21st century idea: denial of the resurrection. He asks, **"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?"** Then he goes on to say, **"If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised."** So in Paul's day, even while they proclaimed that Jesus rose, some people at least, were saying that we won't.

Now it's pretty hard to find a Christian church on the Sunday after Easter that doesn't make some kind of reference to Jesus' rising. But even if they're willing to allow that in some sense, Christian teaching holds that Jesus rose, lots of people today have a real problem with the idea that these bodies are going to come back to life. I once had a catechism class student ask me if there were enough molecules on earth for all the people who have ever lived to rise from the dead. Now, he wasn't challenging the faith. But for many people today, these bodies coming back to life just seems ridiculous. The heart of the difficulty most people have is the fact once you're dead, you're dead. It's over. It's hard to argue with that logic. I've preached at a lot of funerals and no one has ever come out of the box before we were done. Those services are last good-byes because we aren't going to see that person again in this life. So for many people, the Christian hope of rising from the dead seems like nonsense.

Now, that does not mean that everyone is an atheist. Quite the contrary, most Americans believe in some kind of God. And almost all Americans believe in some kind of life after death. It's on TV. It's in children's books, like the Harry Potter series. People today are obsessed with ghost hunting and trying to talk to

the dead. Websites about the occult run in the millions. Most Americans today believe when you die that you go to a better place. But when you start talking about the resurrection, they react like a young woman I once took through a Bible Information Class. She said, “Pastor, are you saying that our bodies are going to come back to life?” She had never even heard of that before. “Going to a better place” is not the same as rising from the dead. Sadly, that thinking bleeds over into the church. If you read your New Testament, you’ll discover that God talks about rising from the dead much, much more than he talks about going to heaven. But what do we talk about most? Heaven, right? The resurrection all too often is an afterthought. Sometimes, it’s in danger of being forgotten altogether.

The people of St. Paul’s day never saw people rise from the dead either. St. Paul was mocked in Athens for preaching the resurrection of the dead. And in the Christian congregation that he founded in Corinth, some people, at least, were teaching that Jesus rose, but we’re not going to. Maybe they thought we’d just go to heaven and that was it. So Paul tells us that if there is no resurrection, then not even Christ rose. How can he say that? Because Jesus was a real human being. Certainly, he was God. But when he took on flesh, he took on all that we are. So if people don’t rise, then Jesus, the real human being, didn’t rise either.

God linked us to Christ. That was his whole plan for saving us. When God created Adam, he made him perfect. God gave Adam one simple rule to obey: don’t eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. You all know what happened. He did eat and because he sinned, he eventually died. All of us share his sin and we’re all dying. God didn’t want that to happen, so he sent Jesus to die and rise in our place. When the Son of God entered the womb of the Virgin Mary and became man, God the Father linked his son to us. St Paul says, **“For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”** Jesus is the new Adam. In a sense, you could say that it’s like Jesus becomes the one person who ever lived. So he took on the guilt of all the sins ever committed and God dumped on him all the hell and all the death that we sinners deserve. He suffered it all in three hours on the cross because he’s God. When he was done, we were done. When he died, we died. And when he rose, death lost its hold on us forever. We will rise just like Jesus did. In fact, all people will rise on Judgment Day. Sadly, all those who refused to trust in Jesus will rise to be condemned and they will suffer eternal hell. But God linked the whole human race to Christ. He gave us his life and death and resurrection. So in Christ we will rise.

II.

That linkage took place before you and I were ever born when God linked the whole human race to what Christ did. But just like those social media sites, you don’t have to pay any attention. You don’t have to take advantage of what Christ gave. You can insist on going your own way, like I do with Facebook. But God still wants to link all of us personally to what Jesus did. **We are linked to Christ. We are linked through God’s promises.**

God links what Jesus did for the whole world to you and me personally through the gospel – those promises that we hear every Easter. Those promises of a resurrection and a new and perfect life with Jesus, those promises that our sins are gone and God will never bring them back – those promises are what give us our faith. Paul focuses us on those promises by showing us what the true result of losing the teaching of the resurrection really means. If there is no resurrection from the dead, in truth there is no Christ. Because God linked his Son to us, Jesus shared our fate. He shared all that our sin does to us and then we share all that he won. So Paul says, **“For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.”**

There’s no “going to heaven” without a real resurrection. If you deny that we rise, if you deny that Jesus rose, you are denying the Christian faith. That’s God’s position, not mine. In our day of liberal theology and bending God’s Word so that it conforms to what we human beings think has to be true and real, more and more churches have a problem declaring that Jesus rose and that we will rise from the dead. The end of that road is to lose the Christian faith altogether.

Why is that true? Because Jesus’ resurrection says that our sins are paid for. You could think of it like a receipt. On the cross Jesus said, “It is finished.” All our hell was suffered and in a moment, he was going to give up his spirit and die for us. The resurrection is God’s way of saying, “Amen.” It’s God the Father’s way of saying that he has counted the cost, he has seen our sin and all that we are guilty of, and he has put Jesus’ suffering in our account. So we suffered, we died, we went through hell. We are now done and we will live. But if there is no resurrection, God never gave Jesus that receipt, that amen, because Jesus didn’t rise. If there

is no receipt, our faith is futile. We are still in our sins. My friends, you know how extensive your sins are. You know better than I ever will just how much you need Christ to take your sins away. Do you want to stand before God without that receipt? That can only lead to death and hell.

If Christ didn't rise, St. Paul says that we're liars because we've all maintained that Jesus rose. He says that all those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. Think how many funerals have taken place in this room. Think how many times Christians have gathered here and heard that their father or mother or sister or brother has gone home to be with Christ and that person will rise on Judgment Day. It was all a lie if there is no resurrection.

Then Paul says, **"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."** When I was in the army, I had a friend who was a Christian. He got very excited about his faith. Now, we were stationed with a lot of educated people who were just too smart for God. My friend argued with those people. He said, "As a Christian I will spend my life loving others. Even if there is no heaven, would that be a wasted life?" Sounds good, right? Except Paul says the opposite. He says if there is no resurrection, our life has been a waste. If we're all going to hell no matter what, we might as well enjoy the ride. We might as well be like the daughter of pastor I know. When she was little her dad told her stop playing with the buttons on the VCR. She kept waiting for him to look the other way and then going back to them. When she saw him coming to spank her, do you know what she did? She started pushing those buttons just as fast as she could to get as much out of that spanking as she could. That's the only logical approach to life if Christ didn't set us free. All that we give up here to live a Christian life, all the self-discipline and the love for others, all the sacrifices we make for God are meaningless if Christ didn't rise.

But he did rise. That is the whole message of Easter. It is the heart and soul of all Christian teaching. Jesus died and then he rose. And Paul calls him the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. He means that Jesus rising is God's proof that we are going to rise. Every year, my wife puts in a vegetable garden. It's a lot of work. Rototilling and fertilizing and planting and putting up the fence, weeding and watering. Why do we bother? When you bring in those first zucchinis and she makes them for supper, you see why. The first ones promise that more are coming. Jesus rose. More are coming. We will rise. All the work and sacrifice to live for God is worth it, because we are going to live with Jesus forever. That promise of Christ rising and then raising us, that is what now links us to Christ personally. It gives us faith and we then celebrate all the benefits that come with Jesus.

LinkedIn is pretty much the only social media site I do anything with. I like the name. It speaks of connections. God makes connections. He connected the whole world to Jesus when he sent him here to be a real human, to live and die and rise again in our place. He connected us to Christ personally when he taught us the promises and gave us faith through that gospel message. You and I are forever linked to Christ. Celebrate that connection. Amen.