

April 16, 2006

“The Truest Story Ever Told”
1 Corinthians 15:1-28

FCF: Shaken view of resurrection > shaken hope

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because of the solid reality of the resurrection,
(magnet) we have the most solid of hopes.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

This part of the country has seen a rash of storms in recent weeks – the evidence of which you can see in neighborhoods and forests as well. We can be really taken back by the size of a tree felled by the wind. *“But it seemed so strong, so solid.”* Then we look underneath and see how shallow the root system was. We see in the break the internal rot that had set in. And then we know. That’s how the winds took it down.

There’s a lesson in that for us. We need to be deeply rooted. We need to be well protected against the rot within. For there are mighty winds that can take us down, that can do great harm to our faith, that can undermine our good confidence in the lynchpin of it all – the resurrection of Christ. All of which is worth considering this Easter Sunday.

SCRIPTURE READING: 1 Corinthians 15:1-28

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

There are many great stories worth our reading, stories that grab us at some deep level and speak to our hearts. Stories by Homer, Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, Austen, Hawthorne, Melville, Dickens, Dostoyevsky, Twain, Lewis, Tolkien, James, or Lucas. Great stories, wonderfully told, worth our hearing because they’re “true” – true reflections of the one True Story, the story of how God became man, died for us, that we might live with Him. These stories are true in that they are echoes of the True Story.

This True Story needs to be heard because it is real. This True Story needs to be held onto because of lying stories, bent tales casting doubt on the True Story. These lying stories, bent tales make assertions from wild assumptions, flying in the face of the evidence. But the evidence for the reality of what we celebrate is overwhelming. The tomb is empty. Christ is risen. He lives – not just in our memory or in His teaching but in this world. The Old Testament predicted this. The New Testament accounts give a consistent record from varying views from a staggering number of ancient manuscripts. There are external testimonies. Roman and Jewish authors alike speak of a movement of followers of this Jesus. Archeology bears out the backdrop of the accounts. Then there is Church History. How else do you explain it? Its beginnings, its growth, the sacraments, the shift of the Lord’s Day, the declaration – no matter the cost – that “Jesus is Lord”? The changed lives – so many over the years – hearts changed leading to lives renewed. Quite a few here can speak to this. I know I can. I was so confused, insecure, and angry. And desperately hungry for meaning. And then came Jesus. *“I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.”* Listen, He’s alive. The proof is there. And here.

Christianity is wonderfully unique in its basis in history – in time and space. These great claims are inseparably connected to historical events. Sever those ties and you’ve destroyed the claims. But the opposite is equally true. Confirm the ties and the claims then hold. The claims and all their implications. It all boils down to this. The resurrection is a solid reality. And because it is a solid reality, we then have a solid hope.

A solid hope because the ties are confirmed and the claims do hold. The claims of a resurrection and the staggering implications. What are they? Think with me.

I. THE TRUTH ABOUT THE PAST

The tomb is empty. And that tells us some things about the past.

A) Regarding Christ

Beginning first with Christ Himself. He has been vindicated.

1. His person

We can see clearly now who He is (**READ 1 Corinthians 15:24**). Jesus is God. He is part of this plan formulated before time, unfolding over the course of history, and culminating at the end of the age. He is God. Paul in Romans 1 (**READ Romans 1:1-4**).

2. His teaching

The resurrection proves who He is. And not only that but the truthfulness of all He taught. Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 15, verses 3 through 5, of the Scriptures pointing to Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus did as well, though the disciples did not understand.

Illustration:

The resurrection has vindicated Him. The Father is saying to the Son, "*Well done, good and faithful servant.*" It is the verification of the Son's last words on the cross, "*It is finished.*" No more sacrifices on altars. The veil of the Temple is no more. The work of the Mediator is done. "*It IS finished.*" Christ has been vindicated.

B) Regarding Ourselves

1. Our forgiveness is secure

And more. Our forgiveness is secure. (**READ 1 Corinthians 15:17**). You do realize the corollary here? If Christ has been raised, your faith is not futile and you are not in your sins! (**READ Romans 4:23-25**) Christ has been raised. We have been justified. He has taken the burden of our sin, shame, and guilt. His righteousness has been applied to us.

2. We have been set free

We have been forgiven. And we have been set free. No longer "*in (our) sins.*" In fact, as Paul says in verse 22, we have been "*made alive*" in Christ, the second Adam.

Application:

Do you hear? Something definitive has happened. Light has dawned. Jesus has been shown for who He is – Lord! And so now we know. His teaching is worth hearing and heeding. He Himself is worthy of our love, our faith, and worship. Now we know.

We know things of Him and things of ourselves. Peer inside. Take a look. The tomb is empty. There is no record. There is nothing to fear. Oh, we need to hear that! For we are so easily burdened. By others. By ourselves. No more! "*Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!*" The resurrection is a solid reality and it gives us solid hope!

II. THE TRUTH ABOUT THE PRESENT

Hope as we look back upon the past and hope as we look around in the present.

A) Regarding Christ

Who does the resurrection show Jesus to be? Not just then but now?

1. His reign

Does it not show His reign? (**READ 1 Corinthians 15:24-25**) He is the King. His is the kingdom. That reign is now – not fully until the future but in place now. And what is the focus of the King's attention? Listen to this prayer (**READ Ephesians 1:15-23**). Did you catch it? He is King over all things, ruling in all things, for the sake of the Church!

2. His message

That's who He is – the King. Sending us out as His emissaries, His ambassadors with a message – a message from the King. "*Hear ye, hear ye. The King has come and is coming again. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*" It's just as He said!

B) *Regarding Ourselves*

The resurrection shows us such things are true of Jesus now. But what about us?

1. Our wholeness

Does it not show that we are whole persons – not just a spirit or a mind but a body as well? Our whole self is corrupted but to be redeemed. Jesus rose from the grave not as a disembodied spirit but with a resurrected body. That means something for us.

2. Our days

And the resurrection tells us something about our days as well. At least these two things. First, there is power. Think back to Ephesians 1. Yes, power shown in the past but the point being that that power is operating and accessible now. That's huge. But there is a second thing. This is not all there is. The tomb is empty. There is a life after death.

Application:

All of which is to say there's more going on than we can see. This is not all there is. This is not what we should be giving ourselves for. And we need to hear that. For we are so easily duped into thinking this is it and it's now or never. But there is so much more that awaits. Think of how that should turn our priorities not just upside down but inside out. Think with me. If this is not all that there is – let me be very direct – how does that affect our “spending habits”? Now by that, I do mean our money. But beyond that. What does it mean in terms of how we spend our energies, our attention, our time?

Illustration:

What are we giving ourselves to? Think in terms of investments. The general rule is that you want the maximum return for your investment. You want to see a payoff. You want to see dividends for the future. Okay. Here's the deal. You can invest it all here and be left with nothing. Or you can give yourself – your whole self redirected by His kingdom's call – to Him and gain it all. Now you tell me. What's it going to be?

The resurrection shows us the folly of building our kingdoms here when we could be investing in His. No more sandcastles. A new day has dawned. “*Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!*” The resurrection is a solid reality and it gives us solid hope.

III. THE TRUTH ABOUT THE FUTURE

Solid hope as we look back to the past, around in the present, and towards the future. Again, think with me as to what Paul is saying. We've seen so much already.

A) *Regarding Christ*

What yet awaits? What has Jesus yet to do? (**READ 1 Corinthians 15:24-28**)

1. His rule

Paul is speaking here of the consummation of the kingdom – when Satan's rebellion will be utterly put down, death rolled back, and all creation under the banner, “God all in all.”

2. His return

His rule. And His return (**READ 1 Corinthians 15:20-23**). His coming will be the true, the ultimate “return of the King.” All injustices made right. All brokenness healed.

B) *Regarding Ourselves*

This is what awaits the whole of the King's creation and His subjects.

1. Our own resurrection

Christ's resurrection is described as the “firstfruits” of our own – the guarantee, the proof of a fuller harvest to come. (**READ Colossians 1:15-18**) That which awaits us, that which is guaranteed to those whose hope is in Christ, can be seen here in Christ.

2. A sweet reunion

What awaits is a glorious resurrection, a restoration of our very selves. And sweet reunions. This isn't explicit here. But it is elsewhere ([READ 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14](#)).

Illustration:

Perhaps the best image I've heard of this is one from Francis Schaeffer. He describes what it was like years ago when the only way one could travel to other parts of the world would be by a long sea voyage. And so off the traveler would go – saying goodbye to loved ones on the dock, walking up the ramp onto the ship, and sailing off over the horizon. Those left behind would often wave with tears in their eyes – longing for the reunion, comforted of knowing it would come about but not sure exactly when.

Application:

It's something like that for us, isn't it? Just in the last year, some of us have had the wrenching separations of death forced upon us. And some of us surely will face it in the near future. There's no point in denying that – the agonizing pain and its inevitability. But there's great joy in being able to look forward to the reunion.

Others of us are going through some really ugly stuff right now. Or we will – injustices, accusations, stolen dreams. There's no point in denying that. But there's great hope in looking forward to the renewal of all things. For with the solid reality of the resurrection, we have the most solid of hopes. *“Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!”*

CONCLUSION:

This is the Truest Story ever told. The beauty, the wonder, the pull of all the other stories find their roots here. This is the answer to our longings, the drink for our thirst, the balm for the ache of our souls. This is the Truest Story to which all true stories point.

Of course, Paul's words in 1 Corinthians show us that lying stories and bent tales have been around a long time. Which brings me back to where we began. Christianity has implications for the here and now – in space and time. And its claims, its basis are rooted in the same. If the tomb is empty, then that changes everything. If it is not, this all means nothing. Which makes the solid reality of the resurrection worth considering.

But perfectly rationale, even brilliant men and women will put forward and buy into the most untenable fables and disbelieve the most believable of historical events. Think of Dan Brown's [The DaVinci Code](#) and all the books riding its wave. Denying the historical record, making up their own – so much unexamined, unchecked. And thus the need to counter the claims – something we'll do next month in the Sunday School hour.

Much of what the philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, wrote over his life concerned the brutal consequences of such disbelief. Late in his life, he wrote ([READ Green, p.82](#)):

With this third world war which might break out one day, with this wretched gathering which our planet now is, despair returns to tempt me. The idea that there is no purpose, only petty personal ends for which we fight! We make little revolutions, but there is no goal for mankind. One cannot think such things. They tempt you incessantly, especially if you are old and think, “Oh well, I'll be dead in five years at the most.” In fact, I think ten, but it might well be five. In any case the world seems ugly, bad, and without hope. There, that's the cry of despair of an old man who will die in despair. But that's exactly what I resist. I know I shall die in hope. But that hope needs a foundation.

Yes it does. Jean-Paul Sartre was wrong in his atheism but at least he was honest.

The truth of the resurrection is there. It is the only solid foundation for hope. You can ignore it. You can deny it. Or you can embrace it. Which will you do?

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because of the solid reality of the resurrection,
(magnet) we have the most solid of hopes.

Salvation, assurance of

Knowing Where We're Headed

Assurance of Salvation; Destiny; Heaven; Hell; Lostness; Predestination; Salvation, assurance of
1 John 5:13

Billy Graham tells the story of a time when Albert Einstein was going on a train to an out-of-town engagement. The conductor stopped by to punch his ticket. The great scientist, preoccupied with his work, with great embarrassment rummaged through his coat pockets and briefcase to no avail. He could not find his ticket. The conductor said, "We all know who you are, Dr. Einstein. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it. Everything is okay." The conductor walked on down the aisle punching other tickets. Before he moved to the next car, he looked back and saw Dr. Einstein down on his hands and knees looking under his seat trying to find his ticket. He came back and gently said, "Dr. Einstein, please don't worry about it. I know who you are." Einstein looked up and said, "I too know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going!"