

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



1 Corinthians 15:20-28 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Have you ever had one of those nightmares that you woke up from and felt a wave of relief rush over you? You probably know what I'm talking about—a nightmare so real and so terribly life-altering that you wake up in a cold sweat—and you realize it was just a dream. What a rush of relief when you realize that it was just a bad dream, and the nightmare is over. Your life hasn't changed after all! You were in the comfort of your own bed the entire time, and all that anxiety eventually fades away. That's the same feeling that God wants us to have when we are ponder the words: "Christ is arisen!"

In our text, Paul is addressing a group of people who had been spreading a belief among the Corinthian congregation that no one can really rise from the dead—not Jesus and certainly not us. What caused them to be so adamant in this belief is unclear, but the result of this idea is clear and devastating. Paul addresses what that would mean in the verses leading up to our text: ***"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished."*** (1 Corinthians 15:17-18) If this false-teaching was indeed reality, we would be living in a nightmare. If no one rises from the dead, then Christ is still dead, meaning that Jesus is a liar, and we are not forgiven. If Jesus is still dead and in the grave then our bondage to death and hell continues. You would live, you would die, you would go to hell; and that would be it.

You've probably heard the saying before, I believe it was Jesse Ventura that first said, "Religion is a crutch for the weak-minded." And he'd be absolutely correct, if in fact Christ had not risen. After all, in the verse just before our text Paul says, ***"If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied."*** (1 Corinthians 15:19) If Christ is not arisen, then all this would be is some feel good story to get us through a dreary life. Then religion really would be a crutch for the weak-minded. But I've got good news for you. Christ is arisen. The theme we'll be considering today is:

The Nightmare is Over: Christ is Arisen!

- I. Rest easy knowing what Christ has done
- II. Rest easy knowing what Christ will do

The saying goes, "To err is human." In other words, "If you mess up, it's ok. Everyone messes up! To err is human! It's a natural part of our humanity." But that's not actually true. To err—to make mistakes—that's not actually a natural part of humanity. To err is really sub-human. For God did not create us as a mistake. We were created in His image to glorify Him! And when sin entered the picture, we really became less than human. Similarly, we often think of death as being the natural end to human existence. But there's nothing natural about it. It's a common trait among humans, that you live and then you die, but that was not God's intent when He created us.

Paul says in our text, ***"For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."*** There's two points of focus in

that verse; first we'll focus on Adam's contributions. ***"By a man came death...in Adam all die."*** Through the sin of Adam and his wife Eve, we have become less than human. We are now prone to error and sin, born on the road to death. And that's because we all participate in the same sin that Adam and Eve did; we all do the exact same thing. Perhaps you've thought before that if it had been YOU in the Garden of Eden, you wouldn't have done it. If you'd been there you would have tackled Eve and stopped her from eating the forbidden fruit. The truth is, we already sin in the same way every day—we would not have fared any better.

Eve's sin was this: God told her one thing, "Don't eat of the fruit of this tree," and the devil told her opposite, "God is a liar, and you should eat of it!" The Devil lied, but the really cunning part of his deceit was getting Adam and Eve to look somewhere else outside of God's Word. And the Bible is clear in saying that Adam was not deceived. He knew as his wife handed him the fruit that it was against what God had said. And he did it anyways. He rebelled. And we line up to do the same. "I know what God's Word says, but I *really* want to do this instead." Every day we face decisions where we are torn between that good will of God that we know because He's told us in His Word and what *we want* to do.

Adam and Eve followed what they wanted to do, they took the fruit, ate it, realized their mistake, and then started the blame game. They blamed one another, they blamed the serpent, they even blamed God before either one of them would admit guilt at their actions. And we act just like Adam and Eve. We know what God's Word says; we do the opposite and rebel. Then we are caught and feel convicted of our wrongdoing, and then it's anyone else's fault besides our own. The devil made me do it! It was my spouse! If they weren't so selfish then maybe I wouldn't have done this. It's how I was raised! It's because of my boss. The blame game fires up, and everyone is to blame other than me.

But the truth is: we are the ones that erred. We've played copycat with Adam and Eve and walked in their exact footsteps. And now that unnatural consequence—death—it hovers over us because of our sin. Now, when someone is born, they are born with their life-clock counting down. Every child that is born we know will one day die. And living knowing that death is coming—that's not really living at all, that's just borrowed time.

This is our condition. We are alive, yet it is certain that our time is running up. Death is lurking around the corner, and we don't know when it will pounce on us. This is the nightmare that we call reality. Although, our text tells us, ***"But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead."*** This verb phrase there, "Has been raised," it's one Greek verb, and it's in what we call the Perfect Tense. That's a tense that is used to describe an action that has been completed but whose results will continue on. Like when a statue is carved out of a marble slab. That was an activity that took place long ago, but the results remain etched in stone.

That is what's being said about Jesus' resurrection. He has been raised from the dead, it was a one-time occurrence that took place long ago, and it's still true. Jesus wasn't the only person who's been raised from the dead. We read about one in our Gospel reading—Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, he was raised from the dead. Even today, people are raised from the dead in a sense, as their hearts stop and they are then revived through emergency measures. But Jesus' resurrection was different from all of those in this way: all of those people who died and rose again died again. A little more time was bought, but eventually they died and were not brought back. They were given a new life, but it was very temporary. But when Jesus rose, that was permanent.

And so for us, the nightmare is over because Christ has arisen. Our faith is not futile, we are not still in our sins. You can rest easy knowing what Christ has done. But He's not a one-hit wonder. He's still

working. And for that reason, you can rest easy knowing what He will still do. You see, He did not rise from the dead just to live in solitude. He rose from the dead so that He could live with you. And that's what He's working for even as I speak. Our text says, ***"Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet."*** At the end, Jesus is going to hand over all His power and authority to the Father, but that means He hasn't done so yet. He's actually using His power right now, because it's His power that is the active agent when the Word of God is being preached. That's what Paul says in his letter to the Romans, ***"I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."*** (Romans 1:16)

There's a saying in theology that says, "The Holy Spirit doesn't need a wagon." It's the claim that God doesn't need to work through things in order to save people—that's beneath Him. But God does work through things, He tells us this. He works through the good news of Christ crucified as found in His Word. He works through baptism as Peter declares, ***"Baptism now saves us."*** (1 Peter 3:21) And He works through the Lord's Supper, which He proclaims is given for the forgiveness of your sins. Those three things are the focus of all of our work here in God's church, because those three things contain the power of God. The power that Jesus is using to extend and build His church. The power He's using to save you. He's not done working because you're still alive. And by His work, you will continue to live.

Another piece of work which Christ will still do is bringing about your resurrection. As we read, ***"But each in His own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ."*** That term "firstfruits" has been used twice in our text. It's an idea that comes from this custom that's recorded for us in Deuteronomy 26, where the people—when they worked the ground and planted, and the very first fruit or grain would grow—they would take that produce and set it aside and offer it to the Lord. It was their way of saying, "Lord, here are the firstfruits. We know that more is going to come." It was an act of faith. If they had any doubt that more produce would follow, they wouldn't have offered the very first fruit. But they knew when they saw that first fruit, that God would certainly give them more to follow.

It's the same in your gardens at home. I asked the kids in school on Friday if any of them have fruit trees at their houses. And a couple brothers have an avocado tree. I asked if when they saw that first avocado grow on the branch in August if they stopped to think, "Maybe this is the only one we're going to get this season." And the one boy made a funny face and said, "...no." This is intuitive. We all understand that when we see that first fruit on the branch, it's the sign that the tree is healthy. The process is working. There's going to be plenty more fruits.

And how fitting then that Christ is called our first-fruit. He's the very first one to rise from the dead, but He's the evidence that we will follow. Because Jesus died and rose again, that means that you too will one day die and one day rise.

And so we see that this religion that we call Christianity, according to Scripture, it's not just a crutch for the weak. It's our very life. For in this Word of God we are granted the assurance that this life is not all there is. We are given the certain hope of more yet to come. You know a few chapters before this is the love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13. In that chapter Paul talks about how everything else will pass away, but we have faith, hope, and love that we can cling to. But then Paul says, ***"The greatest of these is love."*** Love is greater than faith and hope because those things won't remain forever either. There will come a day when you won't need faith, because you will see God with your own eyes. There will come a day when you don't need hope, because you'll have fulfillment of all of God's promises. All that will remain

is the shared love between you and your God. Yes, you can put your hope in this and know that it's not just some far off dream. It's the reality that Christ has won for you.

Let's turn to the end of our text. ***"For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death."*** This year has gone by extremely quickly, quicker than any other year that I've experienced. It's shocking to me that we're on the brink of October, and soon after that we'll be in Advent and then it's 2021. And as the years go by more and more quickly, it's a reminder that our lives are slowly slipping away. Like sand in an hourglass, our days are slipping away more and more quickly and then we die. But Christ Jesus, he took that one certainty that is looming ever closer, and He crushed it. He killed the power of death in the most ironic way, by dying Himself. God says that as your years tick by, as your health fails, and you lose everything you took for granted; you need not fear even death. For it's just the entrance to eternal life.

So Jesse Ventura said, "Religion is a crutch for the weak-minded." And in the way that he meant it, he was absolutely wrong. Because in God's Word there is real power and real hope for us to hold on to. There is certain hope in Christ Jesus. But in another sense, Jesse Ventura was correct. A crutch is something that we need when we're weak or injured or crippled. When we can't get around on our own, we need a crutch.

Being sub-human, full of error and sin, living only to eventually die—we are certainly weak. But this living nightmare is over. Christ is our crutch, He makes it possible that yes, even weak and crippled sinners like us might live again. You and I will one day die, but then we will rise and be glorified before the Lord. Because that's what happened to Christ, so God promises it will happen for you. For you ***"were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, [you] too might walk in newness of life."*** (Romans 6:4) Thanks be to God. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all our human understanding, will guard and keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:13) Amen.

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