

**I Corinthians 15:12-20**  
6 Epiphany C + February 20, 2019  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church • Boise, Idaho  
Pastor Tim Pauls

The Word of the Lord from 1 Corinthians 15:20: “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (1 Cor. 15:12).

It’s a stunning question. Along with all the other troubles among the Corinthian Christians, he had to remind them that Jesus has actually risen from the dead. How could it be? How could it be possible that Christians would deny the Resurrection?

How could it be? We can answer that in two ways. On the one hand, it is all too possible for Christians to deny the resurrection. On the other hand, it’s completely impossible for Christians do so. Here is what I mean.

Too many “Christians” to deny the Resurrection. Many churches today which claim to be Christian question – or outright deny – that Jesus rose from the dead. This, they say, is a fairy-tale ending that early Christians tacked on in order to make Jesus look more heroic and their religion more attractive. In that case, Christianity isn’t about eternal life anymore. It’s about doing good things for other people in this world, since this world is all there is. Such a church has left the gospel way behind, then it leaves the law behind, and the message changes radically. It may reduce Christianity to be only about helping the poor and downtrodden with needs for this life, but nothing more because there is nothing more. It often morphs into all sorts of bizarre, ungodly causes, with claims that true Christianity is about gender inclusiveness, sexual immorality, social justice and the like. Thus you’ll find that many people who claim to be Christian actually deny that Christ is risen, and then go on to promote activities which Christ condemned. In truth, such people are not Christians. To be fair, they don’t think you’re particularly Christian, either, since you can be rather unloving by insisting that God’s Law still applies...and because you buy into that “fanciful notion” that Christ is risen indeed.

Thus we reach our second answer: it’s impossible for Christians to deny the resurrection. They will doubt it at times, when beaten down by trouble and grief – but a persistent denial of the Resurrection removes one from the true faith. Why? Because if there is no resurrection of the dead, then there is no Christian faith. It is not an isolated teaching on the outskirts of doctrine. Rather, it is central. The damage to Christian doctrine is extensive if one denies the Resurrection. Consider a few of the consequences.

If Christ is not raised from the dead, then He remains dead. To believe this is to believe that one person of the Trinity has died and that God is no longer eternal. If the Son is no longer alive, does it not follow that the Father and Spirit can perish, too? It is either this or else the Son was never really fully God, and that is why He died; in that case, no one has died for your sins, and you are lost. Just for starters, denial of the Resurrection does harm the doctrines of the Holy Trinity, the two natures of Jesus and the doctrine of justification. At the very least, it makes Jesus a liar for saying He would rise again.

If Christ is not raised from the dead, then His Word is not living and powerful, because the Word made flesh is not alive to make it so. It’s just information, nothing more. In that case, Holy Baptism is just a splash of water, because Christ isn’t there to join you to His resurrection, since He wasn’t raised. Nor is He present in Holy Communion with His body and blood, to strengthen and preserve you in the

one true faith unto life everlasting. After all, if Christ is not raised from the dead, there is no life everlasting. Furthermore, He's not coming back to judge the living and the dead, so there is no judgment coming: sin doesn't really matter anymore.

If Christ is not raised from the dead, you have no hope – for yourself or anyone else. This life is all there is. Go ahead, then: eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you may die ... and not rise.

We might as well add that, if Christ is not raised from the dead, then everything that we believe, teach and confess here is a bunch of nonsense. We're a group of well-intentioned people who have placed our faith in a man who died 2000 years ago, and who thus are wasting Sunday mornings when we could be fishing. After all, the Christian faith is built upon Jesus Christ, His death and His resurrection. Thus St. Paul declares: "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:19).

That would be a terrible end to a sermon. That would be a terrible End, period. But the text doesn't stop there. St. Paul continues: "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20).

You are not of all people most to be pitied, for Christ is risen from the dead. The Son of God, begotten of the Father from eternity and born of the Virgin Mary, is risen. Let the rejoicing begin.

For starters, the fact that Jesus is risen from the dead declares that He did, in fact, die. He has paid the price for your sins by His suffering and death – and He has been raised from the dead for your justification (Ro. 4:25). You need not ever wonder if God the Father has accepted the sacrifice of Jesus for you. You know that the Father is well-pleased with His Son, for He has raised Jesus from the dead. And if the Father is well-pleased with His Son's Passion and death, then you can be certain that forgiveness is yours – because Jesus is risen from the dead.

He is risen from the dead: therefore, there is no silly idea here that the Second Person of the Trinity has ceased to be alive. God the Son rules at the Father's right hand for eternity. God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – reigns forever. There will never be a time, then, when God the Father no longer provides daily bread for you. There will never be a time when God the Son does not intercede on your behalf as your High Priest. There will never be a time when God the Holy Spirit ceases to bring Jesus and His forgiveness to you in the means of grace. Your triune God will always be faithful – and you can be sure because Christ is risen from the dead.

Christ is risen from the dead: the Son of God who became flesh and dwelt among us died indeed. But He is also risen indeed, body and all. This is an important point: there is a subtle false teaching, even it seems among Christians, who believe that Jesus rose from the dead in soul and spirit, but not in body. Thus, when we die, our soul and spirit rises, many believe, but the body is gone for good. Why this is attractive, I don't know, but beware the danger. To say that there is no resurrection of the body is to say that Jesus didn't fully conquer sin; rather, He conquered it enough to free our souls, but didn't have the power to restore our bodies. This is to say that Jesus failed in His work to redeem us, that sin and death and devil still have some power. But Christ is risen from the dead, body and all. His victory over sin, death and devil is complete.

Christ is risen from the dead. Because He is risen, He will return to judge the living and the dead. Therefore, the law of God matters. We are not left to what we think is best, which always plunges the world into chaos and violence; rather, we give thanks that the living Lord still preserves His law, and we seek to live according to it.

Christ is risen from the dead: therefore He is present with you in His means of grace. His Word here is not just information, but living: because Christ – the living Word made flesh – is present in His

Word. Holy Baptism is not just a splash of water and a nice thought. Rather, Christ is present there, to join you to His death – and to His resurrection. Likewise, the Lord's Supper is not just an inadequate meal in memory of one who died. Rather, it is the Lord's Supper because the risen Lord is there, to give you His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Thus the Lord walks with you. Risen, He thus fulfills His promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Christ is risen from the dead, and rejoice that He is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. He has walked through the valley of the shadow of death so that He might carry you through to the gates of heaven. For now, you and I will witness and suffer grief and separation and mourning, eventually our own death. But you do not mourn as those without hope – Christ is risen from the dead, the firstfruits. He has not risen only for Himself, but for you. He is the beginning of the harvest – and you can be sure that He will raise you – and all who die in Christ – on the Last Day.

Christ is risen from the dead: were it not so, you and I would be the most pitiful of all. But He is risen. Therefore, we will not cease to proclaim both His death and His resurrection, for these are at the very core of the hope that we have in Jesus. Rejoice, dear brothers and sisters: your faith is not in vain. Christ is risen from the dead. And if Christ is risen from the dead, then you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen