

**Easter Sunday**  
**April 4, 2021**

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:12-22

Theme: Christ Has Been Raised

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

On this Easter Sunday (as we do every Sunday) we praise the name of the Lord our God. Let me hear a resounding *Amen* from the people of God. On this Easter Sunday (as we do every Sunday) we show our deep reverence for the Lord Jesus Christ who died (yes) and who has been raised from the dead. Let me hear a resounding *Alleluia!* from the people of God. And on this Easter Sunday (as we do every Sunday) let us bring the message of the gospel home to comfort the bereaved, to give hope to the hopeless, and to bring joy into our hearts. Let me hear a resounding *Amen! Alleluia!* from the people of God. For on this Easter Sunday we remember that Christ conquered sin and death once and for all. Praise be to God!

On Good Friday (at the noon worship service) we encountered all sorts of people who were with Jesus in his final days. Each made decisions on whether to stay with Jesus to the very end or go their separate ways. In his excitement Peter was all *in* even though he had a momentary lapse of judgment when in the courtyard. To his credit he made a full recovery. However, Judas decided he was done with Jesus well before the end of the Passover meal. He not only walked away from Christ but he betrayed him. And then there was Pilate who wanted nothing to do with Jesus or the crowds. As the people shouted for Jesus to be crucified Pilate washed his hands of the whole affair as if that would clear his conscience of any wrongdoing.

Life will always confront us with issues that demand decisions and some are more serious than others. Most decisions do not land in the gray area where there is some middle ground. Most decisions are not (both/and). Most are (either/or). In this past year we have seen people make decisions they never thought they would have to make. Do they pay their rent on time or use their money to put food on the table for their family? For many of us our decisions centered more on

the direction of our lives. People are seeking different employment or moving to a new location because some of us have proven that we can work from home just as easily as from an office.

But out of all the decisions we need to make there is one that defines and shapes our lives the most. And we may not even be aware that it is a conscious decision. It is the decision to remain steadfast in our love for God and to trust in the resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ. In this there is no middle ground for Christians. We need to be all *in*.

It might sound ridiculous because the resurrection of Jesus is the very reason that Christians gather on Easter Sunday. But that was the very issue that made St. Paul put pen to paper when he wrote to the church in Corinth. Here was a new church that was most successful in their evangelism efforts. It grew in numbers and the people grew in terms of their spiritual life. But for all its growth they argued a lot about leadership, about sexual morality, and about their understanding of the Lord's Supper. But the one issue that was most disturbing to Paul was when he heard that the church disagreed about the reality of the resurrection of the dead.

It is for another time to understand why some did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. What is critical this morning is how Paul responded! He told the Corinthians that if the dead are not raised then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised then our proclamation is in vain. Our faith is useless and is simply some kind of wishful thinking. If Christ died but never rose again then we are all in a whole lot of trouble because this is the most critical doctrine in the life of a Christian believer.

Paul told the Corinthians (and by extension us) to get it straight in our heads and hearts because if there is anything that should put joy in our hearts (or make us clap our hands or stomp our feet) it is that Christ has been raised from the dead. It gives substance to our faith.

We will have plenty of moments in our lives when faith is all we have to hold our lives together. We will have times when the odds are against us or the prognosis does not look good or the life of a loved one is suddenly taken away. The one thing (the only thing) that will keep us grounded is our faith in God. God is able to make his way out of nowhere. God just proved that to us today.

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ our faith gives us hope. It is the evidence we need to believe what we believe. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ we no longer have to live in fear. Death has been defeated. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ we are no longer defined by our sins. Our debt has been paid. We are a new creation.

Paul did not budge on this issue and neither can we. If there is no resurrection there is no hope. If there is no resurrection then everything we thought we knew about God is just a lie. If there is no resurrection then all we have is this life and the so-called gospel is not really good news at all.

Paul leans on his experience of seeing the resurrected Christ to respond to the Corinthians. Christ changed him forever. Suddenly the hope of the resurrection was no longer a distant dream. For Paul, the life-giving power of God invaded our world on Easter morning and God invited him (and us) to live a resurrected life right now.

As Christians we do not make decisions about the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (I hope). In this there is no middle ground. But we do need to decide whether or not we will live into that new life that was given to us on the day that Jesus was raised from the dead. Will we choose to live a life that is filled with joy and hope that extends beyond our human suffering or not?

Easter is never over. It will always reflect the dynamic and on-going work of God. The promise of the resurrection is not simply what God has done but what God is still doing. God is still leading us forward into new life and new possibilities and new opportunities for us to discover his love.

On this Easter Sunday we lift our voices and praise the name of the Lord our God. Let me hear a resounding *Amen* from the people of God. On this Easter Sunday we show our deep reverence for the Lord Jesus Christ who died (yes) and who has been raised from the dead. Let me hear a resounding *Alleluia!* from the people of God. And on this Easter Sunday we let the message of the gospel reside deep within our hearts. Let me hear a resounding *Amen! Alleluia!* from the people of God. For on this Easter Sunday we remember that Christ wants us to live into that newness of life right now. Praise be to God! Amen! Alleluia!