

Pastor T.C. Arnold
11th Sunday after Trinity
1 Corinthians 15:1-10
August 31st, 2014

More than five hundred years ago the world was introduced to mass production of printed material. Johannes Gutenberg had invented movable type – the forerunner of the printing industry. The printing press changed everything – and some say that without it, the Reformation, which began just a generation later, would not have had the impact it did. But since then, there have been many improvements to the printing press... how things are printed, what can be printed, and in today's age, the possibilities seem endless.

About two hundred years ago many in our world were experiencing the “Industrial Revolution.” This contributed to much in the way of our modern life today. But since these production methods with machines, water power, power tools, and even changes from using wood for power to bio-fuels, the industrial revolution has been far surpassed by other types of modern technologies that have become a part of our everyday life.

About one hundred years ago the world was about to embark on the communications revolution when Marconi invented the wireless radio telegraph. While at the time this was a major breakthrough on the “cutting-edge,” today that invention seems so rudimentary. Now we have so many forms of wireless communication. We have to check if we are getting paged, messaged, texted, or called.

It wasn't that long ago that the first man was shot into space. Now it seems “not so” significant to have space exploration. Much has improved since our first attempt.

Yet there is one amazing occurrence that happened to this world that cannot be improved. It is for that reason we gather on the Lord's Day to pray, praise, gift thanks and receive what He has done for you. The amazing occurrence is the Resurrection of Jesus. That happened just once, nearly two thousand years ago, and hasn't been improved on since. It didn't need to be. And while we celebrate Jesus rising from the dead on Easter Sunday – each of our Lord's Day celebrations are a little time of Easter – just like we hear about it in the Epistle text for today.

In today's Epistle, St. Paul is writing to the Church in Corinth. Of all the things he could have and did write about, he makes it clear that the most important is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. *“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...”*

It is understandable that Paul should feel so strongly about the resurrection. What can compare with it? How could it be improved? If there truly is a way to break through death (and there is), no other breakthrough or invention could possibly come close in significance. There could be, and would be, no improvements on what has been done for us on the cross of Calvary and then the return to life that Jesus shows us and gives us on Easter – which is for us today. It's the same old Resurrection of Jesus we talk about today that Paul talked about just a few years after the actual event. No improvements can be made... need to be made. This gift doesn't come with a “next generation” upgrade, or a promise of producing more or faster speeds. With the resurrection we have all we need.

Consider the Gospel text appointed for the 11th Sunday after Trinity. We hear the familiar story told by Jesus of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee calls out to God making sure there is a spectacle made of his great work of a righteous prayer. He even points out that he is so much more righteous than that the tax collector because he fasts, gives tithes and doesn't act like him; an extortioner, a man who is unjust. By his own righteousness he calls up to God and points out how he has improved on God's righteousness. How? By being righteous

in himself. Surely this will make his prayer more righteous. By the way the Pharisee acts, he thinks this will improve his prayers.

It won't improve his prayers. It can't improve his prayers. While we may be able to improve on inventions and technology; while we can improve at our job or in school; while we can even improve our relationships with others and even our Lord with good old hard work, we cannot improve on righteousness.

But that doesn't stop us from thinking so. If you have ever looked down on someone because of their fall into sin, you may believe you have an improved righteousness. If you have thought of yourselves as a little better because of what you give of yourself to your community, even to your church, you may believe you have an improved righteousness. And, of course, you think of these things about yourself, not about how God favors you. You have just taken the bull by the horns and worked harder at your relationship with your Lord, grown closer to Him, dedicated more of your life to Him – and you may well have. But does this mean that God loves you more, that you will be able to escape the path of suffering in the world more, that you are more righteous? No. Beloved, beware of looking down your nose at those who are skipping Divine Service today for whatever fun activity they have planned for Labor Day weekend. I say, beware, because it's easy for us to fall into the same trap as the Pharisee – being righteous in self rather than in the Lord.

So, instead, beloved, encourage your neighbor or your friend. Encourage your fellow Christ Lutheran member that you haven't seen in this place for a while. If you have made this place a part of your regular routine, fantastic. You are in the place where God gives you the Words of Eternal life – the sustenance that refreshes our souls. If you haven't been here much, God bless you. I encourage you to come often, be in the Lord's House with your fellow believers. Here is where the good stuff is given to give you strength against all the dismal challenges that we will face in the week ahead.

Beloved, nothing can improve on what was made the best for you to begin with. There is no special music that will give you more of the Gospel. There are no church programs that's going to make you receive what Christ has already promised and given you by His death and resurrection. There are no really cool buildings, there are no great preachers that have better words, than that which have already been spoken in the Scriptures – that have already been promised to you. And because of that, there really is no next generation Gospel that will save you more, make you better, or even make more Christians out of those in our community. It's the same old Gospel. It's the same work of Christ on the cross that does it all. There's no improving it. There is nothing we can add that's going to make it better. It was "last generation" it is "this generation" and it will be "the next generation" Word. The book of Hebrews gets it right, *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.*

We know what is of "first importance," as Paul said. We know what was given and cannot be improved upon. We know that Christ's resurrection, His victory over sin, death and the power of the devil, was the greatest breakthrough of all time. We know that when faith works in our hearts, when we believe on His name – that He is our Savior – we possess the greatest and the latest gift that anyone could ever have. And we can be confident that these things constitute the greatest of all blessings. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.