

FIRST IMPORTANCE

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church 1 Corinthians 15:1-11-22 EASTER 2011 Pastor Michael McCall

A boy asked his mom if she knew what Goliath said when David hit him with a stone. "I didn't know Goliath said anything," his mom replied. "Sure he did. When David put that stone in his sling and hit him between the eyes, Goliath said: "Hmmm, nothing like this has ever entered my mind before."

The aim of this message is to put something new in your mind...and this something new is a stone, a stone called "resurrection". Jesus said **"I am the resurrection and the life."** (John 11:25) What in the world is Jesus talking about - and what in the world does it have to do with you and me? In the next few minutes we will answer both. This Easter message begins a new series - "What Christians Believe". As a church we just completed reading the entire Bible from cover to cover. Now we are going to build a biblical faith. We begin with "The Resurrection". Our text, 1 Corinthians 15:1-22, tells us if the resurrection didn't happen, then we are in sad shape. If it did happen, then everything has changed and reality itself has been altered.

1 Corinthians 15:1-2 **"...the gospel... which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved..."**

The Apostle Paul begins by saying this is the important stuff, the stuff which decides whether your faith makes no difference in your life at all or all the difference in the world. If you don't stand for something, then you will fall for anything! Belief is what we stand for. And yes, some people believe in vain. 90% of the American public say they believe in God. 75% say they are Christian. 40% have a Church Home...and only 10% in Oregon have a Church Home. And though Church participation is not the only gauge or even a true gauge of someone being a Christian - it is a gauge because Christ tells his people to be together. In fact Scripture says at judgment day some will say "Lord, Lord" and Jesus will say "I never knew you". Christian Faith is knowing Jesus. Christian Faith is not just faith professed, it is faith possessed. Going to Church doesn't make you a Christian any more than being in a garage makes you a car. To BE Christian is to know Jesus Christ - which changes our identity into children of God, which makes us alive spiritually, which reorients our outlook on everything to God's perspective, which joins us together as a People with a purpose, which infuses us with God's Spirit, which calls us to the true adventure of Life as "Christ-ians". That is gospel...THE good news.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8 **"...first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared..."**

Faith or trust in the right things - Paul calls things of "first importance" - and goes on with the essentials...Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. And that the resurrected Jesus appeared to a lot of people...some of which read and confirmed what Paul wrote...so Paul is being held accountable and is being backed up by a lot of people. So "Jesus Christ died for our sins" and "Jesus Christ was raised from the dead" is what Paul says is of "first importance". "Sins" are all those things which rob us of life. We liken sin to a computer virus...humans have a virus call "sin" and it is fatal. Jesus died so that we could be rebooted with his Spirit installed in our system. In trusting - **"Christ died for our sins"** - God deals with our past life, so that we can have a present life. In trusting - **"Christ was raised from the dead"** - God deals with our future life, so that we can have a present life...that is our new life in Christ. Bondage to the past and fear of the future are what keep most people from really living life. We believe in the resurrection because it is true...but because it is true and we believe in Jesus Christ, we receive new life and a new reality.

1 Corinthians 15:9-22 **"...But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep...For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."**

Resurrection is the central issue. Christians believe in resurrection. Christians believe that God who gives life gives new life...abundant and eternal life. Christians do not believe in reincarnation - or in resuscitation...that Jesus only appeared to be dead...that does us no good...because at some point, we are going to really die. Christians believe in resurrection because of THE Resurrection of Jesus. Resurrection is God making alive that which is dead. If the Resurrection is true then our reality is altered and our life which has no end and no equal can begin. Because of the Resurrection, the Christian Faith is based on historical fact. Because of the Resurrection, Christianity is not just a temporal, ethical system which helps us survive in this world. Because of the Resurrection, Christians have what they need to really live this earthly life, to die, and to enter a life beyond in a place that can only be described as heaven. Because of the Resurrection, the future is not to be feared, but embraced...because the God who loves us more than we will ever know is there.

There will be much speculation in the coming year about the end of the world. The Christian faith has nothing to do with the Mayan calendar or with Zoraster. Our view of the future has everything to do with the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the God of History. As in all previous times, it may not be in our lifetime, we are to always live as if it could be tomorrow. Because of the Resurrection, Jesus is Lord of the Future. The Resurrected Jesus assures us of tomorrow and gives us glimpses of eternity.

You could say, the Resurrection equips us to die and the Resurrection equips us to live. For any of us, we are only prepared to live when we are prepared to die. A terminal disease can be a terrifying reality; but every person in this room is a terminal case. Every one of us is in the process of dying. As a pastor and in my work with hospice, I see death quite a bit. And absolutely nothing - reinforces my assurance of eternal life like being with a Christian as they die and enter the presence of God. It is obvious when the spirit leaves the body...it is a holy moment. And we realize this body is just a vessel...and the living essence of that person is spirit now reunited with God who is Spirit.

Not fearing death is different from seeking death. Deuteronomy 32:39 says **"Life and death is in the hand of the Lord"**. Suicide not only robs one of life, it robs all others who loved that person of life. Life can be difficult and painful and unbearable, but the decay of the body and the torment of the mind reveal our need for the spirit to be alive to God. As the body ceases, the spirit increases...that is the way God planned it. I have seen friends and family waste away to nothing - yet in spirit grow and be more alive than anyone here. That is life in the spirit...life which has no end or equal.

Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we are released from the fear of death and we are infused with the Spirit of God who makes us spiritually alive...abundantly and eternally alive. Jesus said, **"...I came that you might have life, and life to the full."** (John 10:10). When we are alive spiritually then we are on the adventure of life with Jesus! When we are alive spiritually, we live in the Kingdom of God. When we are alive spiritually then we are "in-Christ" or "Christ-ian". When we battle with depression (and Christians do), we know Jesus is with us. When we mess up (and Christians do), we know we are not beyond forgiveness. When we can't go on (and Christians get pushed to the max), we know his power in us can go on. Resurrection power is the power to live...to have God's life within us.

On this Resurrection Day, I pray God has brought it all together...hitting you between the eyes. bringing something into your mind like never before. What do you do? You ask Jesus into your life. Maybe our children can say "I never asked to be born", but God's children can't say that - asking is the only way to be spiritually born. And for those who have, it is a day to celebrate like no other because our faith and future are certain. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!