



Sermon: “Proclaiming the Good News”  
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11  
Location: First Presbyterian Church of Lake Mary

Pastor: Hugh Lackey  
Occasion: Worship  
Date: February 7, 2010

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Will you pray with me?

Generous God, throughout the Epiphany season  
we celebrate your gifts of light and renewal.  
Ignite the fire of your love within us so that  
we may answer your call to be messengers of your story.  
As we share the Good news of your Son, Jesus,  
help us to pass on your gospel of forgiveness and love  
through our actions and our words.  
In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen

Last week we considered Paul’s view of Christian Love and today we are going to continue eavesdropping on Paul’s dialogue with the church of Corinth. Today we see him address a life or death issue. He addresses the question of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and absolute essential belief that because of Christ’s resurrection we, his followers will also be resurrected from the dead.

It is a simple question with a simple answer, but not everyone chooses to see it that way, therein lies the distinction between believers and non believers. Therein lies the difference between grace through faith or belief that is “in vain.”

Let’s hear what Paul had to say as he eloquently proclaimed the Good News.

*Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand,<sup>2</sup> through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.*

*<sup>3</sup>For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures,<sup>4</sup> and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,<sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve.<sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died.<sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.<sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.<sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.<sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.<sup>11</sup> Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.<sup>1</sup>*

The Apostle Paul was an extraordinary man. After his epiphany on the road to Damascus, we see a man willing to suffer for what he now believed, willing to work tirelessly, and willing to go on in the face of opposition. Paul worked harder, traveled further, and opened more churches than any other apostle of his day. While Paul has more books in the New Testament than everyone else combined he gets mixed reviews on his ability to communicate verbally and in written form. For me personally, I am humbled by his wisdom and insight about God’s love for His people. Sometimes, however he is hard to understand.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version.* Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. 1 Co 15:1-11

Let’s look at the first statement in this chapter - *Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand,<sup>2</sup> through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.*

I am sure that I am the only one that struggled to understand what Paul was saying. A closer review of this statement reveals Paul repeating a message that he delivered in the past - *I would remind you*. The question is – what was that message?

That becomes clearer in his next statements:

- *Christ died*
- *Christ was buried,*
- *Christ was raised on the third day*

These simple statements both outline the essence and the mystery our faith. They make Christianity unique to any other religion and they have not changed in over two thousand years. They represent the core content of the entire gospel and Paul lays it out in a simple declaration for the whole church, then and now. *Christ **died** for our sins in accordance with the scriptures,<sup>4</sup> and that he was **buried**, and that he was **raised** on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.* In the years since Paul spoke these words, which we must realize have far-reaching ramifications, numerous theological systems have been developed to understand the ramifications. In reality these deeds of Christ, the Messiah, and their transformative impact of human sin is amazing simple. Perhaps so simple that it becomes mind-boggling.

Never the less the good news needed to be shared again with the Corinthian church, needs to be shared with the church today, and needs to be shared with those outside the church. We should never miss an opportunity to repeat Paul’s words, *Christ **died** for our sins in accordance with the scriptures,<sup>4</sup> and that he was **buried**, and that he was **raised** on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.*

Paul wanted to state this message because he feared that church was slipping away from their understanding of the message of Christ’s crucifixion and it’s implication for believers. He sensed the same was happening with regard to their understanding of Christ’s resurrection.

He was fighting rumors that Jesus was either not human or didn’t really die. If Jesus was not human then He could not have been killed and that would have made his resurrection meaningless. By emphasizing that he died and was buried, Paul underscored that Jesus was human and was willing to live a fully human life, even including death, but more than that this was a message about Jesus’ resurrection. If we reject the bodily resurrection of Christ, we reject the gospel and as Paul said we *have come to believe in vain.*

The idea that Jesus’ resurrection was inconsistent with the traditional concept of the Messiah. The Messiah they were seeking would not die and therefore would not have to rise from the dead. Paul notes that this statement about the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is *of first importance*. It contained a twofold confession: *Christ died for our sins* and *He was raised*.

He clarifies that these facts are not his opinions, but validated in the scriptures (i.e., Psalms 16:10 and Isaiah 53:8-10). Furthermore, they were validated by eye witnesses, which included Peter, the twelve disciples, and a large number, perhaps 500 or more, apostles who received the great commission before Christ ascended in heaven (Matthew 28: 18-20). He states that most of the eye witnesses are still alive.

Some rejected his claim as simply a pious vision by believers wanting to see through their eyes of faith, but Paul gave two examples, where that claim did not apply. First was James, Jesus’ half brother, who only believed after seeing the resurrected body of Christ (John 7:5). The other was Paul, who met Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6). Paul notes that he was *one untimely born* (abnormally born) because he lacked the “gestation” period of being with Jesus during His earthly ministry. The apostle, which you should note included a much larger group than just the original twelve, were all eye witnesses and that made Paul *the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle*.

Paul felt less deserving of the title of Apostle *because I persecuted the church of God*. But Paul understood that his past was his past and it was now simply a backdrop from which he could display the *grace of God*. Not everyone is so willing to let their past or the past of others they know be a backdrop. It remains a stumbling block for them to see and accept God’s grace.

The resurrection cannot be ignored or stuck in a closet and pulled out when we think it applies. No matter what we were before, scripture promises that the gift of God’s grace is ours through faith. Our faith reminds us that death is not the end. Every funeral or memorial service bulletin I prepare reads “A Service of the Resurrection.” Because Christ died for our sins and rose again, so we will be resurrected from our death and, by God’s grace, have eternal life. We must never forget this and we must never stop saying it or believing it.

The resurrection has to do with situations in our lives and the lives of others that look like a dead-end – where there appears to be no hope and no way to go on. Jesus showed us, through His life, death, and resurrection, that there more than we can see. Our renewal and new life are core concepts to our faith. That was never clearer to me than last week, in Haiti.

Amidst the destruction, death, loss of property, and livelihood I saw faith – real faith. In a meeting earlier this week someone asked me to validate the stories they heard of people in worship and singing to the glory of God. It wasn’t hard, because I saw it everywhere. My laptop has a picture as background of a worship service that was underway when I arrived in Haiti. People of all ages, about 150 in total, were there. I did not see one sad fact. In spite of their circumstance they knew there was more to the story. The good news of Christ’s death, and resurrection was good news for all believers. It is a story we, like the 500 apostles who received the great commission, must share

Paul reminded them of his own shortcomings. He told them *I persecuted the church of God*. He did exactly the opposite of what God wanted him to do. He condoned the stoning of the first Christian martyr, Stephen, yet God, through His grace was merciful to him, forgave him and used him. IF God would do that for Paul, He will do it for you and me.

Last week, I met a changed man. At least I hope I met a changed man. Joe’s older brother, Chesnel, has a past- like all of us. He has not always been dependable, but the death of his father and the earthquake in Haiti has made him rethink his life style and he asked to be a part of the ongoing work of Hope N Literacy. When we announced his involvement in the activities of the foundation, some questioned that decision, but Joe and I defended him, reminding the others that the one without sin should cast the first stone.

The good news is that each and every one of us can have hope in this life and confidence in the fact that there is more to the story. God is bigger than death and willing to give us a second chance; willing to offer us a new life if we are willing to have faith and believe. Believe in the reality that *Christ died for*

*our sins and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.* Because He was raised from death, so will each of us one day.

This is our story. Paul called on the early church to hear, believe, and share it. Scripture calls on us to hear, believe, and share the good news of the gospel. When times are tough, when people are unsure of the future, when we are scared, this is a message that will not disappoint us.

I told you about my friend Sara last week. Sara died at age nineteen, but she left a legacy that we cannot ignore. She was scared, at times, as she fought her losing battle with Leukemia. Here is what she said, when she was scared:

When I was scared  
God’s light shined bright

When I was scared,  
God made no night

When I was scared  
God’s hand was near

To hold and guide me  
Through my fear.

This passage from Paul is often used the week after Easter, with emphasis on the resurrection, and Christ being raised on the third day. For you and me and all Christ-followers, every Sunday is the celebration of Easter. This week ends the season of Epiphany. Next week we celebrate the Transfiguration of the Lord and then we are in the Lenten season. During this time we will recognize and celebrate the revelation and the light of Christ as Lord and savior.

We cannot keep the good news to ourselves. Fear, anguish, addiction, depression, recession, earthquakes, and violence are not the end of the story. The story that we have – the story about Jesus – cannot be killed, cannot be defeated. We have the story of the resurrection; the story goes on because God lives. That, my beloved, is a story that needs to be shared, must be shared, because that is the story of salvation through grace, by faith in a loving and loving God.