

Prayer of the Day: Lord God, in mercy receive the prayers of your people. Grant them the wisdom to know the things that please you and the grace and power always to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ, your son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia. Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia. (John 6:68)

Sermon Text:

Have you ever heard of the field of apologetics? Basically, it is a discipline within the study of theology that aims at defending the faith against the arguments of the world around it. It has gained much popularity in our world today based on the fact that, well, we find ourselves more and more in need of a measured defense against the arguments of a world that is quickly slipping into less and less of a Christian worldview. Some have even deemed the new era of our world today as post-Christian. I suppose that means there is some work to do.

The Apostle Paul lived in a world which in some ways we could label pre-Christian. Now for sure the teachings of the holy Scripture had been around since the fall and there were always those who throughout the pages of history relied on the promises of God, fulfilled in the Messiah, to save them from sin. But the New Testament Church was very much in a fledgling state. In those days, they had to introduce their hearers to every part of the Scriptural truths of the faith fulfilled in Christ and perhaps most challenging was the teaching of the resurrection. The most common of the argument against it, is still heard today. "That simply doesn't happen." So, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul's pen begins to move and as it does, we see it: **OUR RESURRECTION PROOF.**

It would appear as he writes that there were those who rejected the resurrection of the dead for the Christian because he says, "*But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*" You see all of Scripture is one long thread woven into the beautiful tapestry of our teachings. Pick at any one part of this massive picture and the whole thing will start to unravel. So if people don't want to believe in eternal life in heaven or a bodily resurrection at the end of the age well then Paul rightly points out such things make it difficult to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ at all.

Of course, it only gets worse from there. *¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.* Just like that everything is meaningless. No resurrection means the only plan of salvation that works is gone and therefore life is meaningless, and we are lost. At best we fade to black into oblivion and at worst we descend into the endless torments of hell. Ever wonder why the meaningless of life is getting to people more and more these days? I wonder?

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:12,16-20

¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ... ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. ²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. – NIV84

However, Paul says Jesus is more than just a bandage to hide this truth as well, *If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.* If Jesus just is some nice way to say we should be nice to our neighbor and loving to our spouses but doesn't address the real problem of sin and hell, well the atheists are right when they say they can be nice in this world if they want too. Thankfully Jesus is more.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. We'll come back to the deeper meaning in this sentence in a moment, but before we do, acknowledge the massive statement here. **OUR FAITH IS NOT FUTILE BUT FACTUAL.** Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.

Here is where a bit of apologetics comes into play. Notice that Paul simply fires out this statement as if it is an established fact. That's because it is. He lives in a day where people could easily have called his bluff. They could have gone to Jerusalem and talked with eye witnesses of these things. They could have checked with the Romans soldiers if they had not been slaughtered for losing a dead man. They could have checked with the Pharisees who would have acknowledged the body, wasn't there even if they would have tried to concoct a million excuses as to why. They could have even chatted up the women who went to the tomb or one of the countless witnesses who had seen the risen Christ. The evidence begins to pile high.

In fact, it has been said that no other religion makes the claim the Christianity does here. In effect, Paul says, show me the body and we'll all shut our mouths. Show me the body and the entire Christian faith topples to the ground and becomes utterly pointless. Yet in 2000 some years no one has ever done it and they never will. You see, while it's nice to point at the periphery facts faith has promised that the reality is that that body is at the Father's side in heaven, once more wielding all of its glory, power and might for the sake of the church. Christ has indeed been raised from the dead and **THEREFORE**, brothers and sisters, **WE HAVE AN ETERNAL HOPE.**

Right there is why Paul goes through all of this. Everything comes back to those two words, so important in Lutheran Theology, For Us! Yes, Christ has been raised from the dead, with many historical proofs behind the claim but this is significant because of what it does to us. You see He is *the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

Walk it all backwards now. Christ has indeed been raised so we will also live with Him forever. Yes, we shall be raised! Well how do we know? Because Christ has been raised so our sins are indeed forgiven, our faith is not futile but provides a hope that is not for this life only but into eternity secured by our Savior who does it all for us! He is the champion over life and death, who holds those mighty reigns in the palm of His hand so that he can call us from death to life on that last day when He returns in glory for us that we might be with Him.

So our funeral liturgies announce one joyous acclamation after another. Paul himself victoriously bursts forth at the end of the chapter with those joyous words, *"Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? (1 Corinthians 15:54-55)"* Jesus promises, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. (John 11:25-26)"* As it turns out, Jesus does provide one blessing after another as He conquers death and provides everlasting life for His people.

It's true that more and more we live in a world that will have its questions. Brothers and sisters, God has not left us without answers. Today, Paul points to **OUR RESURRECTION PROOF.** As he does, he reminds us that **OUR FAITH IS NOT FUTILE BUT FACTUAL.** and **THEREFORE, WE HAVE AN ETERNAL HOPE.** Amen!