

Title: If there is no resurrection...
Text: 1 Corinthians 15.13-28
Theme: There is no point to life if there is no resurrection
Occasion: Resurrection Day, 2012
Prop Stmt: If you dismiss the resurrection of Christ, then you dismiss everything. But if you embrace it, then you have to embrace the whole story.
Aim: Call people to embrace Christ as King!

Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?
-Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession*

Read Text:

The sermon this morning has one big idea and it is this: If you dismiss the resurrection of Christ, then you dismiss everything. But if you embrace it, then you have to embrace the whole story.

3 stories:

- 1) On March 18, 2012, 29- year old, Joel Shrum, from Mount Joy, PA was gunned down in Taiz, Yemen by al-Qaida “holy warriors” who claimed responsibility for the killing because Joel, was a follower of Christ. Joel, a young husband and father of two young children worked at the International Training and Development Center in Taiz teaching English and business skills to Yemenis. His love for Yemen and her people was evidenced by the fact that hundreds of young people and other protesters, citizens of Taiz, took to the streets with pictures of Joel chanting, “Yemen is not a place for terrorism.” and “We love you Joel.” Here is a man, who in spite of the perils, risked his life in order to be gracious and helpful to people, who in many situations have very little.
- 2) On Monday, April 2, 2012, One L. Goh returned to the small Bible college in Oakland, CA, from which he had been expelled and began systematically lining up people and shooting them. By the end of the day, seven people had died and this man was in police custody.
- 3) Nearly 2,000 years ago (more like 1,983 years ago) Jesus, the Messiah, was crucified, outside the city of Jerusalem, Israel by orders of the Roman magistrate, Pontius Pilate and buried in a near-by tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimethea. On the third day of his burial, much to the chagrin of his enemies and to the amazement of his disciples, he rose again from the dead and was seen by more than 500 people before he ascended into heaven 40 days later.

Here is my point in telling those stories. If you do not believe the third one, then the first two should not matter at all. That is exactly what Paul is saying here to the church in Corinth. If there is no resurrection, then Christ is dead. If Christ is dead all of our preaching is a complete waste of time. Worse, yet, I am misrepresenting God. If there is

no resurrection, then stop pretending that you are going to see someone in the after life. If there is no resurrection, if there is no life after death, then nothing matters. The caring, humanitarian, young, father and husband gunned down in Yemen is dead. The enraged, calculating gunman in Oakland will one day also be dead. The one died as a hero. The other will die as a criminal. But, in the end, if there is no resurrection, it does not matter. If there is no resurrection, then we who act as if there is one, should be pitied because we are delusional, believing a lie. We would then be guilty of wish-fulfillment as Freud accused us of. In other words, I am going to wish something to be true because it is pleasant and makes me feel good. It does not really matter if it is true; it is just a fantasy world that I have created in order to help me deal with the tragedies of life. This is why Nietzsche said, that “Christianity is for wimps.” But hold the phone.

If there is no resurrection, then why would you or anyone care for the poor? They are just going to die. If there is no resurrection, then why would you or anyone care for the elderly and sick? They are just going to die. If there is no resurrection, then why would you or anyone care about justice, or care about hunger, or care about finding cures for diseases, or care about helping anyone? You can spend your entire life making sacrifices and helping out others who are “less fortunate” than you, but what difference does it make if everyone dies and that’s it? Does it matter if people die happy, sad, loved or lonely? Does it matter if people die as missionaries (if there is ultimately no message to preach), or murderers (if there is no ultimate value to live)? If there is no resurrection, then not only do none of these things matter, but in the end, (don’t you get it?) you don’t matter. You don’t matter, your children don’t matter, your parents, your friends, or neighbors nor anyone matters. If there is no resurrection, then no one matters, nothing matters, and there is no point to life – at all! As Tolstoy pondered, “*Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?*” What’s the point? But, if nothing matters, then why does that thought even bother us? And, how do you explain the existence of Christianity?

Now, I suspect that most of you here this morning are not what I would call skeptics. Seriously, if you are a skeptic who dismisses all thought of the resurrection of Christ as ancient, urban legend, propagated by simple, uneducated and easily manipulated people, then you would most likely not be here this morning. So, I am assuming that you do embrace, at least to some level, the resurrection of Christ. So, my appeal to you is two-fold: 1) Do you really understand how incredible this news is and 2) Do you realize its implications?

1. **Why the resurrection of Christ is so glorious.**

- A. **The resurrection of Christ reveals the power of the cross.** (20-22)

The resurrection of Christ is one part of the person and the life of Christ. Now, this is very important to understand. The entire life and person of Christ stand together as one complete picture. You cannot take one piece out that you do not like, anymore than you can add a piece in that you wish was there.

A few months ago Kristin Chenoweth made the news when she was asked how she can claim to be a Christian and not accept some of the “politically inconvenient” statements of the Bible. Her response was classic. She quoted her grandmother who said, “*Well, Kris, I read the Bible like I eat fish: I take the meat, and it serves me well, but I don’t choke on the bone.*” I say her response was classic, because it is classic arrogance. What she was saying was, I look at the Bible and I become the judge of God. I determine which is the part that serves me well (meat) and which part I do not like (bone). The part that I like, I read. The part I don’t like, I ignore. That way I can have a god who only says what I want him to say, but who does not say what I don’t like. Since you cannot carve up the words of God without losing the message, you cannot carve up the person of Christ and the works of Christ without losing his ministry. The resurrection of Christ is glorious because of what it is connected to. In order for Christ to be raised again from the dead, it means that he had to die.

But, how could Christ die when it is the wages of sin that is death? How could God, the author of life, the Creator of the Universe, the King of Glory, and the Omnipotent Ruler of the World succumb to death? How could the One, who with the sheer power of his Word and the mere touch of his hand, bring Lazarus back from the dead and raise the widow’s son. How could there possibly be something in the universe that is more powerful than God? The only way for Christ to die was for him to choose to die. He laid down his life on the cross, but in order to understand the death of Christ, we have to go back and understand the life of Christ. Christ gave of himself in our place not only in death, but before that in his life, which is why you need to see the entire picture and know the entire story, bones and all.

In the beginning, God (Father, Son and Spirit) eternally existed in a relationship so mutually self-giving that it was and is, absolutely deliriously joyful, satisfying and delightful. Keep this in mind. God tells us about himself in his Word, the Bible. He has revealed himself as one God who exists in three persons in this tri-unity relationship of love, harmony, and glorious delight. God delights in being God. God enjoys being God. God’s enjoyment of God is so grand and glorious that God determined to share that. But, who was there to share that with? So, God made the universe in order to have a place where God could put mankind. Out of all of the amazing things that God made, including angels, God made people as the pinnacle act of His creation. And he made us as persons. He made us to be a reflection of the fact that He is personhood. He is divine personhood and we are human personhood, but our human personhood is a reflection of Him. That is why every single human person has value and intuitively knows that there is more to life than just this life. God has given us the innate knowledge of Himself, of right and wrong, of eternity, of love, of relationship because we are made in his image. But God did not make us as computers, robots or machines. He gave us the capacity to choose. And we used that capacity to try to rebel against God. We thought that we knew better. We tried to usurp God’s authority by telling him that we do not want to live under his law. Our representative, Adam, in the garden of Eden, listened to the temptation of his own heart to be like God and eat the fruit that God had put off limits. And when Adam did that, he sinned. His sin cursed himself, it cursed the human race, and it cursed the world. (21a)

Look at what happened in that moment. God made us with the capacity to enjoy him, to love him and be loved by him, to be satisfied with him, to be deliriously joyful and secure and accepted and at peace with and in harmony with and communicating with him. Instead, we rebelled and in a moment all of that was lost. (22a)The history of the human race is the story of violence, rage, war, murder, arrogance, bitterness, harsh words, broken relationships and broken promises. Oh we have our wars and our bombs, but really, at the heart of it all is the violence that we do to each other in our homes and in our marriages, in our cities and in our schools. We lost, all that we were made for. We blew it up. It does not do any good to piously blame Adam because we would have each done the same thing.

So, now what? God could have wiped out the entire universe and started over. But, everything that God does is a reflection of what God is. God does as God is and God is rich in mercy. God is not only Creator, but in the very essence of God's character, he is redeemer. But God is also just, perfectly just. So, how can this perfectly just God justly punish our sins without destroying us? The only way for that to happen was for someone who was absolutely perfect, to die in our place.

Six days ago Lydia Sim, was in her nursing class at college. The 21-year old, one year away from graduation planned to become a pediatrician one day. Lydia was one of the seven victims killed that day at Oikos University. Lydia was a caring, helpful and generous girl. She died, and the killer lived. That offends our sense of justice. In fact, what makes suffering so bad is the sense of unfairness that often comes with it. If you suffer because you deserve it, you have no right to complain. But when someone suffers who was "innocent" we have great anguish. But, this very truth is what compounded the suffering of Christ. He was truly, purely and perfectly innocent, which means that no one suffered the level of injustice that he did. But what is even more amazing is that Christ chose to die. Christ came to this earth in order to do what Adam did not do. Christ came to be our perfect representative. Christ came to live in our place. That means that every single thing he did, he did before the Father so perfectly, so purely, so completely that there was not anything else that he could have done that he didn't do. He was THE perfect man. This man, this God-man, this King, disguised as a servant, this Priest disguised as a Lamb, this Creator disguised as the creation, came to satisfy justice so that mercy full and grace free could be unleashed upon every single person who would trust in Christ. Christ chose to die and take upon himself the full payment of our sin, so that we would not have to. The only way that we can be redeemed to what God originally made us is for us to be re-created, re-made or re-born. We need new life. Christ died on the cross for our sins. But, how do you know that it was enough? How do you know that what Christ accomplished sealed the deal? How do you know that Christ secured a pardon for you that leaves nothing to chance, and nothing to error? How do you know that the payment that Christ made was enough to cover your debt? Beloved that is what happened on Sunday. Christ wrote the check on Friday, and on Sunday God made it clear that the check had cleared the bank. "It is finished" was not a wish; it was statement of reality and finality for all time.

B. The resurrection of Christ reveals the power of his Word. (23)

Christ told his disciples and others that he was going to rise again from the dead. Now, when you read the gospel accounts, it is interesting that the enemies of Christ took that threat seriously, and not his disciples. The enemies of Christ posted a guard because they knew that Christ had said that he would rise again. Now, they did not believe that he would, but figured that the disciples would try to steal his body and then claim that he had. But, my point is, Christ said, "I will rise again." And he did! Do you see what is going on here? The coming of Christ to the earth was something so important, that God spent several thousand years building the stage. And during that time he sent prophet after prophet to announce that the King is coming, the King is coming. The Savior is coming. The Redeemer is coming. Salvation is coming. Rest is coming. Look for him. Trust him when he comes. He is going to heal people, teach people, and even die for us. All of this was predicted in amazing detail. For thousands of years God has gone on record in order to demonstrate that he keeps every promise that he makes. So, when Christ promised to rise again from the dead and on the third day he did it, we see, perhaps the most convincing evidence of all time that God's Word is power. His very speaking is the cause. His speaking makes it be. Our believing does not make it be. Our believing merely aligns us with what already is.

How many times have we heard athletes say, "I guarantee that we will take the next game" or some other bluster like that? Look, you may have confidence, but you have no authority to guarantee any outcome. Only God has all things under his control. So, when God says it; take it to the bank. It is done! It is final! There is no question.

C. The resurrection of Christ reveals his infinite authority. (24-28)

This is all at once the most incredible and the most threatening news a person could ever hear. If you have responded to the news of Christ's death for you, by acknowledging that what he has said about your sin is true, and you repent of your sin and you trust in what Christ has accomplished in your place, then the reality of the resurrection of Christ is a great comfort. It does not matter what the oncologist says, it does not matter what the judge says, it does not matter what your boss says. God says, You are reconciled! You are redeemed! You are declared righteous! You are forgiven! You are adopted! You are in Christ! You get credit for his life, his death and his resurrection. And because He lives, you will live forever with Him, enjoying him and being fascinated by his grace for the all time! No matter who threatens you, no matter who is in the White House, or the outhouse, you are in Christ and the King lives and reigns forever. However, if you ignore the claims of Christ, if you live your life under the assumption that you are fine because others are worse than you, or you really have no use for Christ, you have a serious problem. This is the King who will never be outvoted, run out of office or defeated in battle. This is the King who will never get sick, never face term limits, and who will never die. This is the King, who speaks the truth and it stands, like Him – forever. This is the King of whom it was said, "He is coming" and he did who also said, "I am coming back" – and he will.

2. Why this truth demands your surrender. (1-4)

It is so easy, so common and so disastrous to miss the point of this. Many of you believe, at least in some generic way in the resurrection of Christ. But your generic acceptance of this misses the point. And you dare NOT miss the point. Let me give you an example of what I mean, before I explain what I mean. In the Old Testament, we read the law of God. God gave an exhaustive list of laws by which the nation of Israel was to be organized and governed. At the heart of this law was the sacrificial system of offering up sacrifices for sin because the people could not keep the laws. God set the standard high for the very purpose of revealing to the nation of Israel that they were not good people. He was good, they were not. He did not choose them because they were good, they were a mess. He chose them to show his power and glory and what he could do with people who were a bunch of rebellious train-wrecks. So, in order to keep them humble and to remind them of the reality of their condition, he gave them the law so they would be confronted with their failures over and over, so they would rely upon God all of the time. But what happened? They took the very law that revealed how sinful they were and they twisted it. They took the fact that they had the law of God and used that as a reason to be arrogant. Look at us! We alone have the law of God. That is not the point! The law was to point to your need of Christ because have a need that you cannot fix! The law was there to be fulfilled in Christ but instead, they used the law as proof that they were better than others. So, what happened when Christ showed up? He taught the law as it was intended and he exposed their misinterpretations and their self-deceit. He exposed their sin and they did not like it, so they killed him.

In the same way, some of you are culturally and somewhat religiously familiar with the story of the resurrection of Christ. To you, it is a nice story that in some generic way is related to the afterlife, but, truly, you don't get the point, and my task before God, and very passion of life is to help you understand the very point of this so clearly so that you will get it, grasp it, and believe it. For some of you I have to pull this out from underneath layers and layers of church traditions that have buried the truth under ceremonies and ritual. So, here it is.

When Christ died on the cross, he paid in full the debt of sin for every single person who would ever believe in him. When God raised him from the dead, God demonstrated that He had indeed accepted the payment and that there is nothing left to be paid. Jesus paid it all. Jesus left nothing for you to add to the payment. He did it in such a way that He alone gets all of the glory and all of the credit because He was the one who accomplished it. God's grace provided the only means for your pardon. But that pardon must be trusted by grace alone.

Ephesians 2.8-9.

Because God is rich in mercy, he planned from the foundation of the world a plan to rescue you from your sin. He planned it, he promised it and he pulled it off. And he did it in a decisive, conclusive and amazing manner. Here, at the very moment of Satan's

triumph, when he believed that he somehow had killed the Son of God, he had no idea that what he had done was in reality blow himself up.

In the movie, Hunt for Red October, there is a battle between submarines. One of them launches a missile that, due to the tactics of the other sub, returns to annihilate the sub that sent it. The decisive shot intended to destroy the other was in fact the shot that detonated upon him. That is what happened in the death of Christ. Instead of being the loss of our King, it became the loss of our curse. Instead of being the death of Christ, it became the death of death.

The death of Christ was the payment for our sin. The very thing that Satan has on us is our sin. He can rightfully accuse us of our sin. He can judge us, blame us, condemn us, and seek to destroy us. He can open his portfolio of offenses and pull out reams of documents that spell out in detail my offenses. Every sinful thought, every evil deed, every self-centered word, self-justifying action, every self-worshiping thought alone is enough to condemn my soul to hell. That is the power that Satan has over me, but when Christ, in his dying declared that "it is finished" he rendered all of those offenses null and void. He took all those offenses upon himself. He took credit for having committed all of those sins. When Christ was nailed to the cross, my sin was nailed to the cross. When Christ was punished, my sin was punished.

Colossians 2.13-15 says, *"And you, who were dead in your trespasses...God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."*

And now, the accuser of my soul has nothing to say. My record of sin was nailed to the cross and I bear it no more! Friend, that truth, that Christ died to save you from sin, is yours for the believing. But it must be taken by faith alone. You cannot add your efforts to it. You cannot trust in your religious ceremonies, traditions, or your moral behavior in anyway. It is all for naught. Your only hope is Christ, but he is all that you need because only Jesus Saves!

The question is not, *"Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?"* The real question is, *"Is there anything in life that my inevitable resurrection does not trump?"*

"Because I live, you also will live" – Jesus Christ