

## **"Resurrection"**

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Easter B, 12 April 2009, 9:30 am

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1 Corinthians 15:1-11

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, 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. 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, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 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. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

Prayer.

The older I get, the more I like old.

Old is becoming kind of sexy,

Much more hip than I would have ever imagined 30 years ago.

Wisdom and experience give people a touch of grace

That was rarely found in my early post-adolescent years.

When it comes to biblical scholarship,

Old is hot, it's all the rage, it's what gives the scholars their mojo.

The older a text is, the closer it is to being an original.

Nothing lost in translation.

No missing pieces.

No later day fixing or editing.

Old is where the action is.

Paul's letter to the church in Corinth,

As we have heard read this morning,

Is the oldest of all testimonies to our Lord's resurrection:

Older than Matthew, Luke, or John;

Older even than the first gospel, Mark.

The Gospels were committed to writing

two to five decades  
after Paul's letter to the Christian community in Corinth.  
When it comes to old,  
These words of Paul  
Takes us right back to the very beginning,  
To that Damascus road where Paul experienced the resurrected Christ,  
Testifying in the first person  
Everything that was seen and experienced.  
Our Epistle come directly from the mouth of Paul.  
It contains the essential terms by which  
The Church receives the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,  
By which the Church is still saved.

These are the terms:

1. Christ died for our sins.

Your sins,  
My sins.  
Christ died for them all.  
Kind of like the ancients  
Would make an animal sacrifice  
With the belief that all their sins  
would enter the animal at the moment of death,  
taking all their sins away.  
So, now Christ is the sacrificial lamb.  
At the moment of his death,  
He atones for our sins,  
That is, he takes our sin away from us,  
And in dying,  
Takes every sin away from us for good.  
Redemption.  
Substitution.  
Swapping out the bad and replacing it with the good.  
Christ isn't concerned with quantity or quality.  
He'll take every last sin away from you.  
Big pot, small pot; it doesn't matter.  
Really nasty sins, or the mundane "little white lie."  
Snap;  
Their gone.  
That's it.  
By his death,  
We are made clean.

2. Christ was buried, and rose on the third day.  
A stone door couldn't hold him.  
A decaying, rotting corpse couldn't contain him.  
Even a legion of soldiers standing guard couldn't keep him from rising from the dead.  
"Up from the grave he arose."  
God is the Lord of Life,  
And Life overpowers death.  
Just as God's Son was given victory over death,  
So too are all his disciples,  
Who believe in him.  
By our belief we are washed clean  
And we are saved from death  
Into everlasting life with our Heavenly Father.  
Believe in Jesus,  
And, bam!  
You're saved.  
That's it.  
That's all there is.  
The judgment is over.  
Done with.  
In the past.  
Something we can only see in our rear view mirror.  
Richard Swanson says, "The task on Easter  
Is to tell stories about resurrection  
In a world where everyone dies."  
So stop fixating on your death.  
Don't worry about going to hell.  
Live each day knowing  
That Jesus has prepared a place for you in heaven.  
Life trumps death ten out of ten times.  
Belief in Jesus is the best Euchre hand you'll ever be dealt!

3. Christ's death and resurrection was according to scriptures.  
It's so important, Paul says it twice.  
Two thousand years of Hebrew sacred text,  
Two thousand years of God's faithful attention to his Children,  
Two thousand years of salvation history,  
All come to a climax with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.  
God's hand in creation,  
In Covenant making,  
In Law giving,  
Working through Judges, Prophets, and Psalmists  
Has all been leading up to a bold and mighty act:

God giving the world his Son,  
That whosoever believes in him  
Will not perish  
But will have eternal life.  
Prior to Jesus,  
The world kept slipping into darkness.  
My gracious, the world was a cruel and violent place;  
Filled with debauchery, adultery, thievery, treachery, gluttony, envy, evil, and pride.  
Empires rose and fell by the sword, riches, and excess.  
Even today,  
There is much in our world that prefers living in the darkness.  
Our Hebrew ancestors were no different;  
Riding the cycle of prosperity, to want, to sin, to exile, to restoration ... and back again.  
Not once,  
But time and time again.  
We broke God's Covenant.  
We broke God's Law.  
We wouldn't listen to God's prophets.  
What else was God going to do?  
Isaiah tells us the messiah will come.  
Jeremiah tells us the messiah will come.  
Ezekiel tells us to be ready for him to come.  
Micah, Zephaniah, and Samuel all tell us that he will come.  
So he comes and saves us; and it's us who are surprised?  
We find it hard to rub the disbelief from our eyes?  
Wake up!  
The scriptures have been saying it right along.  
Even Jesus has foretold of his death and resurrection numerous times.  
Christ died and rose again according to the scriptures.

4. Christ appeared to Cephas, to the Twelve, to over 500 disciples, to James the brother of Jesus and to the rest of the apostles.

We all know the eyewitness of one can be problematic.  
But the corroborating witness of hundreds of people  
... every one of them knowing Jesus personally,  
so there can be no mistaken identity ...  
who each testify to his death, burial, and resurrection  
is sufficient fact  
to convince any reasonable court or jury.  
It convinced our apostolic ancestors,  
Who picked up where the Gospel of Mark left off,  
Spread throughout the known world  
And caused Christianity to catch and spread like wild fire.

50 generations of our ancestors were convinced of the evidence  
sufficient to pass the faith down to us.  
Sunday after Sunday,  
Easter after Easter,  
Pastors, preachers, teachers and priests have been proclaiming the witness,  
Spreading Light into a world filled with darkness,  
Proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ,  
His death and his resurrection.

5. Last of all, Christ appeared to Paul, one who was untimely born. The transition is made  
from the body of witnesses to the personal testimony of Paul.

The phrase "untimely born" catches my eye.

There is a universe of difference between

The Apostle Paul in Palestine, Greece, and Rome 2,000 years ago

And English speaking Americans today.

"Untimely born" is the connection we are searching for;

it takes the story from the testimony from a collection of witnesses,  
to the witness that is intimately personal.

Paul was born named Saul,

A Greek,

"of the stock of Israel,"

whose purpose in life had been

to violently persecute the followers of Jesus.

On the Damascus Road,

On or about 33 AD,

He personally experienced the resurrected Jesus,

Who, in his blindness,

Revealed the Gospel, opening his eyes,

Transformed him from Saul to Paul,

Leading him to a life of evangelism and witness.

Today, we, like Paul, are untimely born.

Haven't we taken our turn at persecuting our Lord and his creation?

Our participation in an instant gratification, self-centered, self-absorbed lifestyle

Has resulted in climate change,

the depletion of unsustainable energy sources and

80% of humanity, or more than 5 billion people, living on \$10 a day, or less.<sup>1</sup>

Haven't we participated in the discrimination of others,

Harming others with gossip and innuendo,

Or stood by silently as others have done our violence?

We all have.

Though gathered as a community,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats>

We are a company of individuals,  
Each bearing the burden of deep, dark regrets,  
Who are tired of living in the darkness;  
Tired of living in the shadows.  
Who come this day  
Seeking something better.  
We come seeking the same revelation of the Gospel as the Apostle Paul.  
We come  
Searching for the same blinding Light of Jesus Christ.

6. Paul was the unlikeliest of apostles, because he tried to destroy God's church.  
Where as other apostles had followed Jesus throughout his ministry  
Only Judas had attempted to do harm to Jesus.  
Peter had denied him only to save his own skin.  
The others, by their lack of response, sinned by their omission.  
But the unconverted Saul,  
Like Judas, had actually tried to destroy Jesus and his followers.  
There is no one more unworthy of the grace of God  
Than someone who participates in the destruction  
Of God's only Son.  
No one as unworthy than,  
Perhaps, each of us gathered here.  
If God's grace can save Paul,  
Than certainly God's grace can bring us into the Light, too.  
*The complement to atonement is grace;*  
That characteristic of God,  
Whose motive is the love he has for each and every one of his children,  
That extends to us  
Pardon, before we need it,  
Forgiveness, that follows our repentance,  
And salvation, that gives us victory over the grave.  
The grace of God cannot be earned,  
Banked,  
Or thrown away.  
The grace of God is the active love and support  
Of a personal and intimately involved Lord.  
If the grace of God is big enough for one who sought to destroy the Church  
Then it is big enough for you and for me.  
By God's grace, "I am what I am," Paul says.

Between the two poles  
– the communal and the personal –  
swings the message of Easter.

If today's witness is a creed or doctrine that never touches us,  
If it is just a worn out old story from a dusty old Bible,  
Then gestation has not yet proceeded to term,  
and we, like Paul, remain untimely born.  
If, however, we are touched by the grace of God,  
By the witness of the converted Apostle;  
If we are pardoned,  
IF we step out of the darkness,  
Welcomed into the Light of Jesus Christ,  
then we see that we no longer live,  
but rather  
it is Christ who lives in us  
that gives us eternal life.  
Amen.