

March 31, 2024 (Easter Sunday B)

1 Corinthians 15:17-26

***“Does it REALLY matter . . .
if Jesus REALLY rose from the dead?”***

I was not born yesterday. I did not just fall off the last turnip truck that came down from Canada. I do not have my head in the sand. I am WELL aware of the fact . . . that in families all across this great nation – there were people **who did not WANT to go to church today!** They had a lot of excuses. They whined about it. They complained. They said things like this, *“Do I really have to go? Does it really matter if I stay home today, and you go without me? What’s the point? I hate dressing up. I hate all the singing. The pews are uncomfortable. I hate all the hypocrisy of all the nicely dressed families who pretend they’re so happy, and pretend they actually like going to church. Besides . . . It’s just so boring!”*

And, often, that’s from the HUSBAND – just wait until the kids join in with *their* excuses. Poor Mom has to dig deep into her “bag of good reasons” to go to church on Easter: *“It’ll make Grandma so happy – it’s important to her. It’s tradition. We should at least go on Easter! Put on some nice clothes and suffer through it . . . it’s one measly hour.”* And, if that fails, out comes the **bribes**.

Let’s cut to the real heart of the issue / let me be absolutely CLEAR: *If Jesus . . . did not REALLY rise from the dead . . . and I’m not talking about “keeping his memory alive” or some sort of “spiritual” resurrection in the hearts and minds of those who loved him . . . I mean REALLY – as in: this person Jesus was stone cold dead on Good Friday – and on Easter Sunday – that SAME JESUS, was alive / totally healed / breathing / back from the dead and walking around on Easter Sunday. If THAT did not really happen . . . then stay home on Easter Sunday. And don’t bother coming to church on ANY Sunday – because it is a total waste of time.*

That’s not just over worked, disgruntled, and grouchy old Pastor Halldorson talking – **that’s what the Bible says!** The Apostle Paul said that. We’ll back up 2 verses from where our text begins:

1 Corinthians 15:17–26 (NIV) 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 of all people most to be pitied.

If Jesus did not REALLY rise from the dead – your Christian faith is **futile**; it’s useless. Your sins are still on your permanent record, and you will be held accountable for them. You are not REALLY forgiven for anything. Therefore, if your Christian faith is only a matter of this life / of tradition / of culture / of pleasing Grandma (or anyone else) / of getting a chocolate bunny, or whatever else was used as a bribe to get you here . . . **that’s pitiful and pathetic.**

When we look at the **pitiful and pathetic** state of Christianity in our country – it becomes very clear: not many people apparently believe that Jesus REALLY rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. Christians *used* to go to church every week! Churches *used* to actually teach what the Bible says (or at least, more so than they do today). Churches *used* to be built with the most expensive materials available and located in the best parts of town . . . not any more. If you can even find a “successful” church out there today (by outward standards) – it’s usually because they have figured out how to be a church for **this** life. They tell people what they WANT to hear – they offend no one. They provide lots of practical and helpful tips for real life situations – all with comfy chairs, and in a very entertaining and pleasant environment. Some churches even offer “drive through” services – so you can stay in your PJ’s and not even leave your vehicle. If the “Christianity” we have left is only a “Christianity” that has found some measure of relevance for THIS life – then it’s nothing but a colossal waste of time.

In fact – I won’t stop there. If Jesus did not REALLY rise from the dead . . . your **entire life and existence** is just a big waste of time. If Christianity is just another man-made religion of stories and myths . . . and when you’re dead, you’re dead – that’s it . . . then nothing you do or accomplish really matters anyways. Or – if there is some totally unknown Designer and Creator behind the mystery of life, and the beauty and complexity of our world and universe – and, if once dead we stand before this “God” that no one really knows anything about . . . I would be terrified of that day. *What if He’s not happy with how you did? What if He’s going to make you pay for each one of your mistakes and poor decisions?*

In either case – put THAT day off as long as you can! Stay at home! Stay off the roads and keep clear of all those crazy drivers! Avoid any situation that might be dangerous to your health! When you get up, wrap yourself up in bubble wrap and put your helmet on

right away! **Death** is out there lurking in the shadows. And no matter how much you try to avoid it, it will always find you.

Yikes! – *What a pitiful, fear-filled, and miserable existence!*
It certainly would be . . . if Jesus did not REALLY rise from the dead. But . . . **HE did.** Paul saw Him. Hundreds of eye-witnesses saw Him. The ancient Scriptures predicted it. Jesus Himself said that He would. And – He **really did!** Paul makes that fact abundantly clear for us in the remainder of our text: **1 Corinthians 15:20-26**

20 “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

Jesus REALLY rose from the dead – and so will every human being who ever lived / every single descendent of Adam and Eve. On the Great Day of Judgment, by the power of Christ Himself – everyone will rise from the dead. Yes, even Adolf Hitler and Osama Bin Laden will be brought up from the depths and have to stand before Him. Those who did not *really* believe that Jesus was the Son of God who died for them, and REALLY rose from the dead – will have to answer for every single one of their sins. Those who did really believe that He died for them and really rose from the dead . . . will have already been **forgiven** for all their sins, and they can look forward to that Day with excitement and eager expectation!

So . . . does it really matter if He really rose? Nothing is more important. It’s not just a matter of life and death – it’s a matter of eternal life, and eternal death. The Bible says He did. I believe He did. The people in our church believe He did. There is an outstanding amount of evidence that says He did. If you’re not certain about it, let us help you look into it.

Does it really matter if I BELIEVE it? Jesus says that it matters more than anything else in your life! HE said this, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save**

the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.” (John 3:16-18). And, Jesus also said, **“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).

But – does it really matter if I come to church more than a couple of times a year? **Yes** – it does. If this Jesus really **is** the Son of God – and if He really died for our sins, and if He really rose again – we’d better LISTEN to Him. He wants us to spend time with Him and remain connected to Him, and “church” is one of those ways He provided to keep us connected to Him with a living faith. He told us, **“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”** (John 15:4-8).

If we don’t spend TIME with Jesus, our faith will die out – and that would be MORE than tragic. We need the forgiveness that He has won for us. We need direction from His Word. We need wisdom from God. We need comfort and clarity for life. We need the joy that only He can provide. We need the TRUTH – it sustains us through all the battles of life until our King returns and puts all His enemies under His feet once and for all. It’s good for us, and necessary for the health of our faith which is more valuable than anything we have.

Besides all those **gifts** that He wants to *give* us through His Word, and in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper . . . and no matter how painful church may be . . . **He is worth it.** He’s worth getting up in the morning. He’s worth the time it takes. He’s worth sitting on hard pews and listening to LONG boring sermons – He’s worth it all, and infinitely more – because He died for you. And – He really rose from the dead – and that matters more than ANYTHING else!