

“This is What We Preach: Christ Crucified and Raised to Life”

Dear friends, it's quite a world we live in, isn't it? And I don't necessarily mean that in a good way. We live in a world, in a city, within a culture, that is stacked against us. You've heard the truth. You've heard it from faithful messengers, and by the grace of God, you have accepted it. But all around you are people who are convinced that what you believe can't possibly be true. It's impossible. It's unbelievable. But if you let go of it, you lose everything.

Just look at some of the issues that you face. Sexual immorality is all around you. People have even come to call good the actions that God calls evil in no uncertain terms. Everyone seems a little too caught up in the grand promises of freedom, to the point that they rarely consider how their actions might affect others. Even within your church, you find that people look out for and serve themselves in many ways when they should be reaching out and serving others. There are factions and divisions and disagreements. And you certainly have heard the voices of those who insist: no one comes back to life after they have died.

Yes, people of Corinth, you need to be on your guard. You had Paul live among you and work with you for a year and a half. He shared with you God's word, the message that Christ himself had given to Paul. But when he moved on to other mission destinations, things weren't so great for you in Corinth. It's good that you wrote to him with your questions and concerns. It's good that he had also heard additional reports that he could respond to. It's good that you've heard from him again. You would do well to pay careful attention to his letter.

I know this isn't the city of Corinth in the middle of the first century. This is Tucson in 2013. And while so many things have changed between then and now, so many things are exactly the same. The sinful human nature hasn't changed. The temptations have only changed in the details and nuance—they still surround us and challenge us in many of the same ways. And that is why it is our joy to turn to these words from 1 Corinthians this morning and to hear the message that the Corinthians needed to hear. We need it, too. It makes all the difference in our lives, too. The message is: Christ has been crucified and raised to life.

This is what Paul writes to the Corinthians and to us: **“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, [and] that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”** This is the message. It came first to Paul so that he in turn could share it with others. Christ did what God promised he would do. He died, and he rose again.

Christ died according to the Scriptures. Prophets like Isaiah had long ago promised that he would be **“pierced for our transgressions”** and **“crushed for our iniquities.”** And Paul could testify that the words of the prophet had been fulfilled and that **“the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”** Christ died for our sins. It's not just the sins that are “out there” in the world that we need to recognize. The sins in our own hearts and in our own lives are the sins for which Christ died. Our petty selfishness, our doubts and baseless fears, our willingness to set aside God's word for the sake of our own feelings—Christ died for these sins, just as God had promised.

And they took his body down from the cross and placed it in a tomb. He was buried. He was really dead. There was no mistake. There was no confusion. There was no hesitation as they rolled the heavy stone in front of the opening to seal the lifeless body inside.

But when his followers went back just days later, they found the stone rolled away, and they saw that the tomb was empty. Now, we can no doubt appreciate and understand their surprise and their confusion. One

explanation seemed natural: someone had taken him away. The enemies of Jesus were eager to blame it on his disciples. But here's the reality: no one should have been surprised. As Paul wrote, **"he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."** This is what God said would happen. We sang Psalm 118 a few minutes ago, which proclaimed in the words of the Messiah, "I will not die but live." Psalm 16:10 testifies, **"you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay."** And Isaiah 53:11 says, **"After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied."** And Jesus himself taught his disciples that he would die and rise again (see Mark 8:31, etc.).

And no one could deny that was exactly what Jesus had done, because he appeared to them alive again. Paul lists a number of examples: Jesus appeared to Peter, to the twelve, to a group of over five hundred believers, to his own brother, James, to all of the apostles, and finally to Paul himself. Paul wasn't just retelling a story he had heard. The living Jesus had come to him. The Corinthians could talk to Paul or to any of the other five hundred, most of whom were still alive, to hear the eyewitness account that Jesus was alive.

We, too, on the pages of Scripture, have heard from the eyewitnesses and from Jesus himself. He is alive. Every word he spoke, every promise he made was true. Your sins have been forgiven. God has accepted the sacrifice of his own Son for the sin of the world. You may die an earthly death should God allow the world to continue until then, but because your Savior lives, you will live again as well. No wonder that Paul says that this message is "of first importance." What greater message could there be? What greater comfort could we find? What greater reason could there be to celebrate than Easter itself, the day that our Savior rose from the dead?

And what greater reason could there be to share that message with others? Paul first met the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. At the time he was better known as Saul, the persecutor of Christians. He was bent on bringing an end to Christianity, if need be by bringing an end to the life of every believer. He never stopped appreciating the grace of God that would reach out even to a man as evil as he was. And he responded to God's grace by sharing it with others.

Though we, too, may marvel at God's grace to the Apostle Paul, we dare not underestimate the grace that God has shown to us. While we may never have breathed out murderous threats, our sins are just as damning and just as serious and just as much an affront to our just and holy God. And his grace to us is just as real.

It's by God's grace that you are here to listen to God's word as it is spoken from the lectern or the pulpit and as it is sung by the choir, and as you join to speak it and sing it. It is the message that you received and on which you have taken your stand, the message that God in his boundless grace and mercy has forgiven your sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ his Son.

It is good for us to stop and to celebrate. It is good for us to sing together and to praise the Lord. But what about later today? What about next week? What about those who have not yet heard the message that's been repeated for you today? Allow me to offer suggestions based on what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15. Let's gather around God's word regularly to be reminded of and to remind others that Christ died for our sins and was raised to life again. Let's follow in the footsteps of Paul in sharing that message with others who need to hear it. Let's support the work of those, who like Paul, were sent out with that message as missionaries and teachers.

Some of the details are different. Tucson is a different place than Corinth, and 2013 is a different time than the first century. But some things never change. This is what we preach: Christ crucified and raised to life. Jesus Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1–11 (NIV84)

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹ Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.