

Easter Day; The Resurrection of our Lord; March 31, 2024
"Jesus' Resurrection is The Biggest and the Best"
1 Corinthians 15:19-26

If our hope in Christ applies only to this life, we are the most pitiful people of all.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came by a man, the resurrection of the dead also is going to come by a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ they all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ as the firstfruits and then Christ's people, at his coming. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has done away with every other ruler and every other authority and power. For he must reign "until he has put all his enemies under his feet." Death is the last enemy to be done away with.

Hello, my name is...well, it doesn't really matter. Why don't you call me Benedict, because I'm blessed. More about that later. I have been granted leave to speak to you as celebrate the resurrection of our Savior Jesus.

I used to live in Corinth. Such a beautiful, prosperous, cosmopolitan place. Even better than being a Corinthian, I was a Christian. Of course, we didn't call ourselves Christians; that was a derogation at the time. Anyway, I believed in Jesus, along with some others in Corinth. Paul founded our church, which met in the homes of believers. Our congregation in Corinth had some serious problems. Lots of problems. Big problems. I won't even try to list them all off, because we don't have time for it. But there was one problem I will talk about today: the biggest one of all.

There were some guys in our church who were saying that Jesus didn't really rise from the dead. Now, Paul said he saw Jesus risen from the dead. Paul had also spoken to many others who had seen Jesus risen from the dead. In fact, it was only about twenty years after the first Easter, so there were still lots of people around who had seen Jesus risen from the dead.

The problem was that now some guys were coming along saying, "No, that didn't happen. Look, people," they said, "people already think we Christians are crazy enough. We don't need to be teaching that people Jesus rose from the dead. Sure, Paul says he saw Jesus back from the dead. Sure, lots of others say so, too. But have you ever seen anyone risen from the dead? I haven't. What about you, Benedict?" "No," I said, "I haven't." "Well, what do we see?" they asked." I said, "Well, I saw my dead father burn on the pyre, and then I saw his dust float off." "Exactly," they said. "Death is death. There's no coming back from that."

But I said, "What about what Paul told us? What about all the other witnesses?" And they said, "Think about it, Benedict. Death is death. No one comes back from it." So I thought about it. Death is death. And I'd never seen anyone come back from it. But I also knew what Paul had told us.

But then I thought: does it really matter? Maybe Jesus' resurrection means something else. Maybe it's an allegory of some other truth. Maybe it's a symbol that's meant to give us hope. Maybe it's a metaphor about the beauty and value of life, and how we ought to cherish each day before it's all over. Or maybe Jesus "rising" means that we remember him and he lives on in our hearts. Yeah, that must be it, because like those guys were saying, death sure does seem final.

I've been in heaven a long time. Would you believe I never had the chance to tweet? And by "tweet," I mean use a bird caller, which weren't invented until 1700. I was dead for sixteen centuries already by

then. So maybe you think what I've been saying doesn't relate to you. But you'd be wrong about that. Because though not in your church, specifically, in many Christian churches there are loud voices saying just what those guys in my congregation were saying so long ago: There's no way Jesus actually physically rose from the dead. After all, have you ever seen someone rise from the dead? What do you see when someone dies? Body in the ground. Ashes in the urn. End of story. And you don't want people thinking Christians are crazy, do you? Don't you want to be relevant to your world? And so, what if Jesus didn't bodily get up and walk around on Easter morning? It's not that big of a thing. He can still be alive...in a sense. In your hearts, symbolically. Metaphorically, reminding you that life is valuable, and you should live it to the full.

But you know, sinners like you and me, we don't even need to hear those ideas from other people. We all have a brain that thinks, eyes that see, ears that hear. And so even from inside yourself and every sinful self, come the voices: it's not that big if Jesus rose or not. Either way, he's good. Either way, he's alive in your heart. Besides, you see for yourself what death looks like: the end. Don't be silly. Jesus alive in your heart? Okay. Alive metaphorically? Fine. But actually walking around on Easter, actually still physically alive in heaven? Let's at least leave room for the possibility that it didn't happen. And if didn't, well, no big deal.

But here's the thing: if you want to think rationally, you will have to admit that it is a big deal for Jesus to physically rise. Because the Bible constantly links his resurrection on Easter to his death on Good Friday. Paul knew there were these voices in our church saying, "Resurrection? No big deal." And of all the problems in our church, he saw that as number one. Because, as he told us: resurrection on Easter means forgiveness was won on Good Friday. So yes, it's big. Here's another reason it's big: resurrection for Jesus means resurrection for you, too. Jesus rose to break through death, so that you will follow him on the last day. Jesus' resurrection isn't just big, it's everything to your Christian faith: it is the forgiveness of your sins and the promise of your own resurrection.

Paul and the other witnesses of Jesus' resurrection understood just how big it was. That's why Paul didn't give up on us Corinthians, or let those other voices in our congregation have their way. It's also why Paul and the other witnesses of the risen Jesus were willing to sacrifice their homes, their freedom, their health, and their lives for the fact of Jesus' resurrection. That's not what self-seeking conspirators do; they back down as soon as a story costs them more than it gains. Paul and all the other witnesses of Jesus' resurrection gave everything for its truth. They had seen with their own eyes the truth that guarantees our forgiveness and our own resurrection.

If you ever hear someone raise doubts about Jesus' resurrection – even if that someone is your own self! – you need to ask an important question. If Jesus didn't rise, what's the point of following him? He calls people to sacrifice and suffer for him, to give their whole lives to him, with the promise of a resurrection and final victory...and then leaves them in the ground? It's the truth: **If our hope in Christ applies only to this life, we are the most pitiful people of all.** Suckers is what we are, sacrificing and carrying crosses for nothing, if Christ has not been raised.

His resurrection is big; it's everything. Your sins are forgiven and your own resurrection is guaranteed. So his Easter victory is not only big. It's the best for everyone who believes it. **But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came by a man, the resurrection of the dead also is going to come by a man. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ they all will be made alive.** There are many rational arguments for Jesus' resurrection; a couple I've already used. But this is what the truth comes down to: you know it's true because God testifies to it. St. Paul

wrote this letter, inspired by the Holy Spirit to write God's own Word. God wants you to know not only how big the matter of Christ's resurrection is, but that it's reality. And because it is, you have the promise of joining him, me, and all the saints in heavenly glory until the last day. Christ's resurrection is God's stamp that his death on Good Friday removed the punishment of your sins; he died so that you will live with him and me and all the saints, including all you love who have already joined us in heaven. The death of believers, God says, is falling asleep.

Physical death was not the end for Christ, and it will not be for you or for any Christian. I died, you will die, because Adam brought death into the world with sin. One man sinned, all were held accountable. But you will also rise because the curse of sin was removed on the cross, and Jesus rose ahead of you. One man removed sin and rose: **so also in Christ they will be made alive.**

Jesus' resurrection is not just big. It's the best. It's life forever. And it's the best, even now, even before you die. It's the best life to walk around each day knowing that this life, this world, is not all there is. It's the best to know that whatever God gives you in this world, you can be content because there's a whole world, a perfect world, to come. It's the best to live without worrying about being remembered by the world, needing a lasting legacy here, because God will remember you for eternity. Jesus' resurrection is the best for your life every day.

It's the best thing there could be when you have to attend the funeral of a fellow Christian, or you lovingly remember a Christian friend or family member who has died. They have only fallen asleep; they live with Jesus, with me and all the saints. That's the best. You miss them, of course. But they have it better now than they ever did here. And you never said goodbye for good, only goodbye for a bit.

And it will be the best when your time comes, to be able to say in your heart and your lips – so your family and friends know your hope – that the most frightening of all, is nothing for a Christian to fear. You live, even though you die. Nothing is better to believe, to know, to say at that time: Jesus lives, and so will I.

And it will be the best when you, when I, when all believers stand and see what Job saw through faith: our Redeemer lives, standing on the earth, and we will see him ourselves, with our own eyes. The ladies at the tomb heard the angel say, **"There you will see him, just as he told you."** The angel was talking about seeing the newly risen Jesus in Galilee. But what the angel said is true for every Christian, too. We will see him there, standing on the earth, just as he told us.

Christ's resurrection is not only big, it's the best truth for all who believe it. **For he must reign "until he has put all his enemies under his feet." Death is the last enemy to be done away with.** Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! This truth is the biggest, the very center of our faith, the fact on which all Christian truth depends. And it's the best: his life is ours, now and forever. He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.