

27 March, 2016

FROM DEATH TO LIFE
1 Corinthians 15.12-26

Rev. Frank Breisch

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!
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That's the message of Easter, right there! If you take that statement with you in your heart, you have celebrated Easter well! For Easter is about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Actually, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus every Sunday. That's why we worship on the first day of the week, for that's when Christ arose in triumph over the grave. But especially on Easter Sunday we focus on that great message: Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!

The resurrection of Christ is an event of tremendous significance. It literally changed the history of the world. Such an awesome event can be understood in a number of ways. This morning I want to think with you about just two aspects of the resurrection.

First, think about how the resurrection validated the ministry and death of Jesus. The resurrection was God's way of saying 'Yes' to everything Jesus had said and done. Suppose the story of Jesus ended on Friday at sundown. A Jewish scholar said that the Jews consider Jesus a failed Messiah because nothing changed. The Romans still ruled the Jews. The kingdom of God, as the Jews expected it, had not come. Jesus was a failed Messiah who was properly repudiated by the Jewish leaders and crucified by the Romans. If the story of Jesus ended with his burial, then that view of Jesus is correct.

BUT... Paul says, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead." Jesus died and was buried, but death could not hold him. That is the Easter message. And by raising Jesus from the dead, God did something that had never been done. Oh, it's true that Jesus raised some people from death, like his friend Lazarus. But that was only temporary. Lazarus is not still living. Lazarus died a second time. But the resurrection of Jesus was different. As the hymn says, "He arose the victor o'er the dark domain and he lives forever with his saints to reign. He arose! He arose! Hallelujah, Christ arose!" Jesus rose in triumph over death!

That was a message to his contemporaries. They had heard him teach. They had seen his miracles. But they had decided that he was a false Messiah, not sent from God but carrying out his own programme. To them the resurrection was a clear message: 'Wrong! The resurrection was God's stamp of approval on all that Jesus had said and done. The resurrection declared that even the cross, that emblem of rejection and shame, was part of God's plan. And the resurrection brings that same message to us: Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the chosen representative of God. His birth, his life, his ministry, his death are all

validated by his resurrection. Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Christ of God, the Saviour of the world.

Second, think about how the resurrection was the destruction of death. Paul says that death is the last enemy. Ah, but it is a defeated enemy! When Jesus rose from the dead, the power of death was broken. We all know what death does. Death ends all our activities. Death separates us from all those we love. Death puts finished on the works of our life, whether large or small. The rich and the poor, the wise and the ignorant, the powerful and the powerless all come to the same end. We all die! But Paul says, "In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died." Christ did not just rise for himself; he rose for us. He did not escape death; he broke the power of death! Because of Christ's resurrection, the final word is not death but life!!

So, how long do I want to live? Forever! How long do I expect to live? Forever! Oh, I know that I'm going to die, but that's just a minor interruption. Life lies ahead!

Yes, because of the resurrection of Jesus, the final word for you, for me, for the world is life, life, life! That's what makes Easter so wonderful - Christ has broken the power of death and assures us that with God we shall live....forever!

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Thanks be to God!