

“What do we hope for?” 1Co 15:12-20

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

The last week we meditated on the very central event for Christian faith, and I emphasize the word “event”, and that is – the resurrection of Jesus. We reflected how certain the foundations of our faith are and how assured we can be that everything happened exactly as it is written.

That Jesus was betrayed, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, and on the third day He was raised again. And then He appeared to Peter, and Mary, the Twelve, to all the apostles, to His brother James, and then to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom were still alive when Paul wrote his letter to Corinthians. This is how certain is this message.

But now about the very event of resurrection. Why is it so important, so central to Christian faith? Why would we say that this event is at the very heart of Christian faith? First, for it affirms beyond reasonable doubts who Jesus was.

Yes, He claimed to be one with God the Father, and the Jews understood it well, that Jesus was making claims that He was true God. And with His resurrection, showing that He is in control over everything, even over life and death, Jesus established the truthfulness of His claim. Jesus was true God in our flesh.

On very practical a level by His resurrection Jesus also showed that all the other human made religions are false, that no one can somehow merit the eternal life, but only receive it from Him – as undeserved gift.

The second reason, why Jesus’ resurrection is so central to our faith, is because it reveals to us what our ultimate hope is. How do we say in the Creed? We believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Where? In New Heavens and New Earth.

This is at the very heart of what we believe and hope for. The life to come, where we will be like resurrected Jesus and where we will see Him as He is. However, in Corinth there were some, who denied and rejected this hope.

To them Paul is appealing writing the words which we read today. Paul shows them the centrality of the resurrection, – if there is no resurrection, then Jesus

wasn't raised either. If Jesus wasn't raised then there is no forgiveness and we remain in our sins, accountable for everything that we have done and everything that we have failed to do. Then there is no hope of the resurrection for us. There is no hope for the life with the Son of God in the New Heavens and New Earth. It also means that all who bring the message about Jesus' resurrection are - liars.

But as Paul was appealing to the Corinthians, he said something that makes every Christian to examine ourselves: **“If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”**

If we think of Christ or Christian faith as useful for this life only, then we are the most miserable of all people, deserving to be pitied the most. So, let's examine ourselves? Do we believe in Jesus' resurrection?

Do we believe that we will be raised up in new resurrected bodies? Do we believe and hope for our new life in the New Heavens and New Earth? Now, do we also live as if we believed all of this? Are we here because of the hope of the resurrections and the life everlasting?

Different people may have different reasons. Some belong to a church for their families were Christians. Family traditions, so to speak. Some identify as Christians because they believe that that is what good people do, and they want to be considered good people. There is this myth still alive that if someone claims that they are Christians, it somehow makes them look better.

Some participate in Christian activities, for that is what all their friends do, and where else would they go. Already from these examples we can see that there may be different reasons why people are members in congregations.

The sad fact is that even many churches teach as if they didn't believe in the resurrection. Their whole focus tends to be on this life only. How God will help you in your daily life. And, surely, He does.

How God will bless you if only you do the right things, how you will prosper and how nothing bad will ever happen, if you are a real Christian. And, of course, our gracious Father blesses us in many ways, including earthly goods, and He does protect us from evil more than we know.

But if our entire focus is on this life, and material blessings, and avoiding every kind of sufferings, then our faith is not in the God of the Bible, but more like in a genie, who is supposed to fulfill our wishes. “Let my will be done!”

That is a dangerous road. If that is where our focus is, then what happens, when we don't get what we want. What happens when what we love is taken away from us? What happens when we suffer, and can't understand why?

If our faith is in a genie, if we hope in Christ in this life only, then it is very easy to lose such faith. And I guess many of you would have witnessed this

happening with people whom you know. “Why did God do this to me? Then I don’t need such God.”

Besides, if our focus is on this life only, and not on the resurrection and the life everlasting, then people are robbed or rob themselves from the deepest experience of our Lord powerful presence.

Then we struggle to fully trust that our Father loves and cares for us, whatever happens in our lives or around us. Then we struggle to experience the presence of Jesus who has promised to be with us in all our challenges, hardships and sufferings. He is with us and no one can understand what we suffer better than Jesus, for He not only cares for us, He identifies with us.

Most of you would be familiar with the story of Job. It is an eye-opening story. Job, this pious and devout man had received so many God’s gifts and blessings. And then suddenly they all were taken away, without any obvious reason.

Many can relate to this experience, when we lose what we love. Then He called upon God, He challenged God to come and to explain his sufferings. Finally, God came and spoke with Job. But... He didn’t answer any of Job’s questions.

Instead, the holy and almighty God revealed Himself speaking to Job. And when He had finished speaking, Job was transformed by the presence of the gracious God. There were no more questions “why?”

Instead Job said that “I had heard about you” (meaning, I had some ideas about you and, surely, I was grateful for your gifts in this life), “but now I have seen you” (meaning, I have experienced your presence as you are).

“And now I know that if only I have you, I have more that I may ever dream about. Now most of all I long to be with you forever.” If only I have you, your presence with me, I have more that I could ever dream about.

Wonderful example of what true faith is like! But what changes if we indeed believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting? Many wonderful things happen. Then Christian faith, that is, our trust in the one true God becomes of the highest importance.

Then it is of the highest importance to keep and nourish our faith. To strive to fear, love and trust in our God above all things. For, remember, as Jesus told in the parable of the banquet in Luke 14, no one enters the eternal banquet without true faith. And how do we receive and nourish this saving faith?

We know that faith comes from ... hearing and hearing ... through the word of Christ. When we hear the Word of God, then the Holy Spirit comes to us and creates in us new hearts, God Himself creates and sustains this saving faith.

It means that when we believe in and hope for the resurrection we care to be where the word of God is preached and taught, and we really care that what is preached and taught is indeed the word of God in its truth and purity. For as we

know, the Holy Spirit doesn't accompany false teachings or our own ideas, but only the truth of the Gospel.

If we believe in and hope for the resurrection, we are also concerned for others, especially for those people in our lives, who don't know God as their loving Father and Jesus as their Master and their Brother.

Then we pray for opportunities to serve and witness them, to bring them into God's own family, so that they too can receive the gift of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting in the New Heavens and New Earth.

When we believe in and look forward to our resurrection, it is a joyful and meaningful life. The resurrection changes everything. For one, as we already discussed, it gives us confidence to witness about Jesus, to tell what the true God has done in our history and what He has prepared for those who love Him.

How comforting then it is to know that whatever happens with us, we are in the hands of our loving Father and nothing in the whole creation will separate us from His love, we just need to keep our faith, to run the race, and the crown of righteousness awaits us.

Such true faith enriches our lives and fills them with good things. How good it is to know about, to reflect upon and imagine and dream about what our gracious God has prepared for us. How surprised we will be to see our new home, the renewed Earth, perfect in its beauty, prepared for us.

How exciting it is to learn to understand the Gospel and to experience when God's mysteries unfold before us, how interesting it is to listen to Jesus Himself speaking to us, whenever we have such opportunities, in our congregations, at home, with our families, with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And what a privilege and honor it is to be God's own chosen messengers to other, putting on all God's armor and battling for their salvation in prayer, and allowing God to use us for His purposes.

And how uniquely joyful Christian experience it is when we share the same rejection and sufferings that Jesus and all His faithful witnesses, prophets and apostles. For that was this world's attitude to them as well.

Remember the words of Jesus: **“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.”** [...] **“Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.”** (Luke 6:22-26)

It is great to have this hope of the resurrection, to share it, to suffer for it, for then it means that we are already with one leg in the world to come, in our true eternal home. In our reading Paul finishes his argument on high.

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Jesus has been raised from the dead. And this is not the end of the story. For us, who live hoping in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, this is just a beginning. For Christ was raised as the first-fruit of what is to come. He was the first to appear in new, glorious, resurrected body. And we have received the same Spirit, who raised Jesus.

Therefore, as Jesus was raised so will we, in similarly glorious, powerful, imperishable bodies, for the life that will supersede anything that we can imagine now, and which will last forever.

This is what God has revealed to us, this is what we hope for, and this is where we are heading. Amen.