

**1 Corinthians 15:20**

Easter Sunday (Series C)

**Lessons for the Day: Isaiah 65:17-25; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26; Luke 24:1-12**

**Behold the Man—The Victor!**

*April 21, 2019*

***“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”***

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

If you were to ask people whether they prefer Christmas or Easter, I think the majority would likely say Christmas. Christmas is filled with sights and sounds that grab our attention. Christmas has upbeat music, the bright lights and the special celebrations. In terms of presents, Christmas far outshines Easter. Oh, yes, there are Easter bunnies and chocolate. Many will have a big meal to celebrate the weekend, and we look forward to sharing that meal with family and friends. Some will decorate their homes with spring colours; we will decorate eggs and eat hot-cross buns. Christians will rejoice in the hymns of Easter. But radio stations won't be adopting an all-Easter music format. Malls don't go all out on Easter decorations, and if they do, they are just spring flowers or Easter bunnies. It is hard to miss the excitement of Christmas. Easter seems almost insignificant by comparison.

Which matters more—Easter or Christmas? The truth is you can't have one without the other. Christmas assures us that the Eternal God, who created the world and all that is in it, has come to His people and is born in our human flesh. But it is Easter that brings to a climax all that Christmas only begins. It is Easter that makes it clear that the Eternal Son of God—the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who united His divinity into our humanity—became a man so that He could take our place under the law. He became man so that He could bear our sins in His body, and pay the price of our sinfulness by suffering and dying in our place. And, thanks be to God! The resurrection declares that Christ is also the True God, whose sacrifice is enough to deliver us from sin, from death, and from the death of hell that we would face if He had not died and risen again for us. It assures us His Word is true. And it is our guarantee that we will rise to life, through Him who is ***the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.***

This day, my dear people, turns the whole world upside down! This day assures us that the problems, cares and worries of this world have been overcome. This day is the day that takes away our fears of both life and death. It is the day that defeats the futility we would feel in the cemetery, as it reveals the living hope we have in the Living Lord. Why, then, do so many people misunderstand Easter and reduce it to a celebration of spring or use it as an opportunity for wearing new clothes and overindulging in chocolate? Don't they know what they're missing?

We know what they are missing. They don't see the risen Lord. They struggle, as did the Corinthians, because they just can't wrap their heads around the idea that the dead can come back to life. We hear it all the time—the Bible's Easter story is a nice story, but it can't be real, because the dead don't come back to life. Sadly, there are even those who claim to be preaching God's Word who admit that they don't believe that Jesus rose physically from the dead.

Paul was blessed to be among those who actually saw the risen Lord. There were many who were eye-witnesses to the risen Christ. Mary Magdalene and the other women who came to the tomb that first Easter morning saw Him. Peter, John and the other disciples saw Him. Good old doubting Thomas saw Him and believed. Jesus' brother James saw Him, and Paul assures the Corinthians: ***“Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.”*** (1 Corinthians 15:6, ESV) Paul can also boast: ***“Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.”*** (1 Corinthians 15:8, ESV) Through God's Word, and the power of the Holy Spirit, there have been countless people who have known and believed, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the Saviour who died is alive.

Today, we have the privilege of seeing again the wonder of God's love and grace, and the power of Christ's resurrection. This day is the basis of our faith; in fact, Paul says in the verses before our text: ***“if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”*** (1 Corinthians 15:17, ESV) Even as Paul reminds us how hopeless things would be without the resurrection, he comes out with the assurance we hear: ***“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”***

On this glorious Easter Sunday, Paul calls you, and me, and all people to, “Behold the Man - the Victor!” Behold the One who set aside the glory of heaven to come and live our life, feel our pain, and even suffer our death, who now lives as the victor over death, hell and the grave. Behold the man, who had nothing special in His appearance that we should be drawn to Him,

yet who draws so many who fall down at His feet with joy and thanksgiving. Behold the man, of whom Isaiah says: ***“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”*** (Isaiah 53:3, ESV) But now that man of sorrows is the Victor, who rejoices to give life and salvation to all who believe in Him, who turn to Him and trust Him. Behold the man, who ***“humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”*** who is now the exalted Lord, given ***the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***” (Philippians 2:8–11, ESV)

Yes, my dear friends, behold the Man—the Victor! You need this Saviour, this God and man who came because you would be lost without Him. You need this Saviour, who takes all of your guilt and shame into His sinless life, and pays the price of that sin for you. You need this Saviour, who sets you free.

I put a little filler in the bulletin today, which says: An empty tomb proves Christianity; an empty church denies it”. Sadly it seems that the miracle of the resurrection does not hit home with many people. In the newspaper on Good Friday, there was a small article about a recent Gallop poll in the United States, noting that the percentage of U.S. adults who belong to a church or other religious institution has declined by 20 percentage points in the past two decades, down to 50% from 70% in 1999. In Canada, the number who *claim* to be Christian is slightly higher, but far fewer—only 21% in a typical week—attend services. The truth of the resurrection; the power of this glorious news, doesn’t seem to resonate in the hearts and lives of so many. Maybe it would be different if we had been with the women who went to the tomb that first Easter morning. These women had seen all of it. They had seen the Lord of life, paraded before the crowd with the crown of thorns; with his back torn by the lash and face bruised by the blows He had received. They had been there, at the foot of the cross, witnesses to the truth of John’s words: ***“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*** (John 1:29, ESV) But they didn’t think of the removal of sin. They grieved the loss of the Lord they loved so much.

On that first Easter morning, these heart-broken women came to the tomb. But they did not behold—they did not see—a lifeless corpse. They did behold the glory of an angel who declared the good news, ***“Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.”*** (Mark 16:6, ESV) Mary Magdalene will see her risen Lord in the garden. The women will see Him as they go to tell the disciples what the angel had declared. They behold the Man—the Victor. For them, and for the other disciples, nothing will ever be the same.

Dear people, behold this Saviour today in His Word and in His holy supper. Behold Him who lives for you, to bless you. Let the glory of this moment sink into your hearts and lives. Find your hope in what Paul says: ***“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”*** Behold the Man—the Victor. He is *your* victor. You have life, hope and peace in Him. You are forgiven and free because He died and rose for you. Take it all in. Bask in the glorious good news. Keep looking to Him who alone can give you life.

There was a family that lost three of its four children within two weeks due to a virulent disease. One child was left, a four-year old boy. The family had buried the third child just two weeks before Easter. On Easter, the parents and child went to church. The mother told her Sunday School class about the resurrection. The father read the Easter story in Sunday School as he led the opening devotion. People who knew of their great loss wondered how they could do it. They could do it for one reason, and for one reason only—and that was because they, by faith, were looking at Christ, the Victor. They knew and believed that the Lord who had risen from the dead was the same Lord who would raise their children to live with Him in the glories of heaven. Did they feel their loss and their grief? Of course they did, but the resurrection gave them the courage and strength to go on, knowing that death had been defeated. Martin Luther knew that same hope. When he was overcome by feelings of sadness or despair, he would write with chalk on his desk and the walls of his room “vivit, vivit” He lives! He lives! When asked what he meant to say with these words, Luther said, “Jesus, my Saviour, lives. If he were not living, I would not want to live one hour longer. But since He lives, we shall live through Him.”

Behold the Man, my dear friends! Behold the One who knows you better than you know yourself, including all the ugliness of your sin, and who loves you just the same. Behold the man, who in His victory gives you life—the life that He first gave you in your Baptism, but which He will give you in its fulness in His glorious time. Behold the Man—the Victor, the One who is your firstfruit. He lives, and so you will live. Death cannot hold Him, so it cannot hold you. Satan cannot defeat Him, and as you behold Christ, our Victor and live in Him, you can be sure that Satan cannot defeat you, either. Behold the Man—but more than a Man. Behold your God and Saviour, who lives to be our help, our strength and our victory in time of distress. Behold the man, and praise Him for all He has done for us, and for all that is ours through Him. Amen.