

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Third Sunday after Easter, April 21, 2013**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)  
Hymns: 200:1-6, 190:1, 201, 210, 200:7-8.  
Lessons: Job 19:25-27, Romans 8:1-18, Luke 24:1-12.  
Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 15:12-20.  
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Can you imagine how horrible it would be if some really important and cherished truth that you had accepted and believed were found to be a lie? If some fact or idea you have believed all your life was not the truth, but a lie that had been told to you? Suppose that something you have believed in, had confidence in and trusted in, turned out to be false. How hurt you would be! How crushed you would be!

That's the kind of situation Paul sets before us today. Paul makes it clear that someone in their midst has been contradicting what he and every other Christian preacher and fellow believer has been saying about Christ's resurrection. Remember that Paul is writing by inspiration "*To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--their Lord and ours:*" (1 Corinthians 1:1-2) It is as if someone in our midst – a member of our congregations – has been publicly saying "What the pastor says is wrong" or "What the pastor teaches is untrue." Or it is as if someone of our fellowship was living and acting in such a way as to make a mockery of what is taught from the word of God. Today let's look at this proposition:

**IF JESUS DID NOT RISE FROM THE DEAD ...**

1. **Then everything would be hopeless for us.**
2. **BUT! Jesus DID rise from the dead.**

Paul began this chapter by saying: "*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, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 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. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.*" (1 Corinthians 15:1-8)

So someone is contradicting what has been told to them from God. But Paul does not take this contradiction of his teaching personally. Far from it. He makes no mention of any personal involvement or hurt feelings but he is completely objective. "*But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*"

In your personal world, you might think that everyone who claims to be a Christian has to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But that is not true. There are many who ask the question "Has Christ really been raised from the dead?" And there are many who deny that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. They are not just among the sects and cults, but sadly, even among those claiming the name 'Lutheran'. We need only look at What's Going on Among the Lutherans? (1992, NPH, Leppien and Smith) That book documents what official publications and seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – and you know people who go to that church, don't you? – teach about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The kind of arguments the ELCA makes are such ideas as "resurrection" concerns some kind of 'spiritual body,' not our earthly remains. The tomb was not empty on the first Easter morning. Jesus did not 'physically' rise from the dead. Perhaps we

may speak of some ‘spiritual’ resurrection.” (p. 114) From this you can plainly see that there are many today who claim **“that there is no resurrection of the dead.”**

The argument that Paul makes is a carefully crafted statement, a closely stated position, the kind that a good debater would use: If this is true, then that is also true.

There are seven “if” statements, all of them negative and hopeless, that offer the idea that must be summarized “Jesus did not rise from the dead”. But make no mistake. The point of Paul’s inspired sermon here is that Jesus Christ did rise from the dead.

How many of you have taken a geometry class? One thing that I remember from my high school geometry is the idea “if this is true, then that is true” and especially “If this and this are true, therefore that is true”. Paul uses that kind of logic.

If you deny that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, then everyone who told you that lied. Christ’s followers lied, and there is ultimately no hope, no forgiveness for sin, no eternal life, and Christians are to be pitied more than all men. If Jesus wasn’t raised from the dead, then Christians are still in our sins. This section then concludes on a tragic note. Christians have made a bad, sad, choice. They have denied themselves, and sacrificed, and suffered for their faith in vain. If all the conditions in our sermon text were true, there would be no cause for anything but total depression and utter hopelessness in our lives, or in the lives of anyone.

Believers in Christ are always hoping that the sufferings of this present time are not worth being compared with the eternal bliss and glory that will be revealed in them on judgment day. They base that hope on the kinds of things Paul had preached: ***“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”*** (Romans 8:16-18)

But that kind of hope is an idle dream if the words at the end of the Apostolic Creed “The third day he rose again from the dead” were never true. What a miserable end to a great hope and any life dedicated to believing in Jesus Christ.

Paul writes: ***“But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”*** From this statement, we must conclude that some even in this congregation in Corinth were denying that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. Remember, we are talking about events in the first century, just a few decades after Jesus walked on the earth. We have no idea who in the congregation was saying this, but this reflected the typical pagan Greek Philosophy and attitude toward the doctrine of the resurrection: The Greek playwright Aeschylus, about 500 B.C. wrote “when the dust has drunk the blood of man, and he’s once dead, there’s no uprising.” When Paul was in Athens, we read that ***“A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbling trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.”*** (Acts 17:18)

A denial of a resurrection also denies Christ rose from the dead. ***“If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.”***

If one says or believes these things, he or she is denying the fundamental doctrine of Christ’s Resurrection. When that doctrine is lost, the entire message of salvation is lost. All of Scripture is that way. Deny any one doctrine, and if you follow it out, follow it through, you end up denying in essence all other doctrines of Holy Scripture as well. Holy Scripture has been called a “web of truth” as opposed to a web of lies.

Today, of course, there is no lack of people denying the resurrection of Jesus Christ and thus also the resurrection of all who die.

Paul makes the application that if no one is raised from the dead, then Jesus didn’t rise either: ***“But he – that is, God, – did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.”*** It works both ways: ***“For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.”*** Paul is making perfectly logical sense. He is using logic here to make a point. Although faith in Jesus Christ depends on believing and trusting God, there is a place – up

to a point – when even the Christian can use the logic of the world. But scripture plainly says: *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."* (Hebrews 11:1)

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then no one will. If no one will rise from the dead then there is no such thing as the idea of the resurrection of the dead.

Then he makes a terrible application and conclusion: Therefore, he says, *"And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost."* He says, if all this is true, then you are still buried by your sins. There is no forgiveness of sins. And even those who died believing in Christ are lost to eternal damnation. That is the eternal consequences of this false teaching, of this rejection of the teaching of God's Word, the testimony of eyewitnesses, and the proof God gives us.

But Paul even makes clear the consequences here on earth of NOT believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. *"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."*

If in this life only we are hopers in Christ, if all hope for the future is vain and a foolish delusion, if there is no forgiveness of sins, no hope of a future inheritance in heaven, then indeed we Christians are of all men most in need of pity. For to insist upon a hope that has no basis, that can never be realized, and to deny all material things for such a hope – that would give the unbelievers a right to consider us weak-minded fools who are to be pitied for their miserable delusion.

This would be really a doom and gloom sermon – and even a gloom and doom religion – if we had no hope for eternal life. If there were no way of assuring a better life after death, then we would have no reason to do anything except live for ourselves, gratifying all the lusts we have following *"all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life"* (1 John 2:16)

All of Christian faith and life would be a lie and a mockery. If Christ is not raised, your faith is useless, vain, has no beneficial results. It is a delusion. And since that faith is essentially trust in the forgiveness of sins made possible by the work of Christ and sealed by His resurrection, it follows that you are still in your sins and any teaching of the atonement is a mockery.

Paul concludes his tightly woven logic on a tragic note. If, if, then, Christians have made a terribly bad, choice. They have denied themselves, they have sacrificed for their faith, they have suffered uselessly. It is no wonder that Paul says *"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."* What fools we have been to have counted on that hope if there is no resurrection. (PAUSE for five full seconds.)

But I dare not say amen to end this sermon now.

The Word of God assures us: *"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."* Here begins his victorious line of argument. Christ has been raised, and this sermon of victory goes on for about 38 more verses! He concludes the chapter:

*"We will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory.""*

*"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."* (1 Corinthians 15:52-58) NOW I can say Amen, that is, Yea, yea, so shall it be! Yes, it shall be so! Amen.