

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**The First Sunday After Easter, April 27, 2025**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)  
Hymns: 198, 189, 278, 203, 200:5-8.  
Lessons: Isaiah 49: 1-13, Acts 9:1-22, John 20:19-31.  
Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 15:3-11.  
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How many witnesses do you need to assure you that something is true?

In a courtroom today it seems that it takes more than one witness to convince a jury of 6 or 12 people that something happened, or that it is true. Lawyers often pile up witness after witness to make their point.

What would you think about the importance of eyewitnesses? When we see something with our own eyes, it usually remains with us longer than if someone else tells us or writes about it for us. If we are studying history and we read something that an eyewitness said, or even more exciting, if we listen to an eyewitness, that often makes the event more memorable. So there is something to be said for the reliability of eyewitnesses and the excitement associated with eyewitnesses.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact. We believe that as a fact because God in his Holy Word says so. But Paul here even gives us eyewitnesses to the fact that Jesus Christ appeared alive after his death and resurrection. Jesus truly rose from the dead. He is really alive. Today we are assured that

**THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST IS OF THE FIRST IMPORTANCE**

- 1. Many human witnesses can testify to his resurrection,**
- 2. But it is the grace of God that led you to faith, not a multitude of human witnesses.**

Paul is laying a complete foundation for his instruction to those in the Corinthian congregation who had any doubts about the resurrection of Christ.

This chapter begins: *“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,”* (1 Corinthians 15:1–4, NIV84)

Jesus then appeared to “the twelve” – his Apostles, his closest disciples. The first example is on the very night of the day he rose from the dead. They were gathered secretly, for fear of the Jews as we read in John: *“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.”* John 20:19-20

Then, later, he appeared to them again and Peter is mentioned, too – when they were in Galilee. John is the one who plainly records this most clearly. Actually, the group he calls “the twelve” was only a group of eleven, because Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, had committed suicide. But Scripture still refers to them as “the twelve”, and it wasn’t until after Jesus ascended into heaven that one was selected – “called” – to fill Judas’ position among those called “the 12”.

We don’t know exactly when and where Jesus *“appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time.”* Saint Paul adds that some of these 500 are still living at the time he wrote this, probably about 25 years later. So Saint Paul’s first readers would be able to track down and find, if they chose, some of those

who personally saw Jesus alive after his death. And there is always something exciting about hearing the facts from an eyewitness.

Some of those who saw Jesus in person were now dead. ***“Have fallen asleep”*** is the way Saint Paul writes it. That is a reminder that things are always changing. We don’t always recognize it in our group gathered here today. It is more easily recognized in larger gatherings. But you will never ever have a chance to get together with this exact group of people and hear and sing and do things exactly as you are doing them right now. That thought is made obvious when, for example, a once-popular television program has a reunion, and someone mentions the people who died who are no longer with the original cast for such a “reunion”. Well, you have a chance each week for a “reunion” here with these same people who believe and confess as you do, who want to hear the Word of God. Things and groups are always changing. We don’t plan when we will die. Only God knows, and so that should be a reminder that today is the day, now is the day of salvation. You will never be in exactly the same situation, with all the same people again, as you are right at this moment. Saint Paul had written earlier in this letter, making reference to the words of Isaiah, with all earnestness: ***“As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, ‘In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.”*** 2 Corinthians 6:1-2

Paul also writes that Jesus ***“appeared to James”***.

There are two men named James. One is James the brother of John. We read of him in Acts 12:1-2: ***“It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.”***

Following that event, the same king Herod then captured Peter, no doubt intending the same treatment – death – for Peter. But ***“Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. ‘Tell James and the brothers about this,’ he said, and then he left for another place.”*** Acts 12:17 This James is also mentioned in Acts 15:12-19: ***“The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. When they finished, James spoke up: ‘Brothers, listen to me. Simon [Peter] has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: ‘After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things that have been known for ages.’ ‘It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.’”*** We who are Gentiles are reminded from these words that it is totally God’s grace which has saved us and called us to be his faithful children.

After the appearance to James, there is a reference that he appeared ***“to all the apostles”***. He appeared to them in Galilee, when they were fishing and he publicly showed forgiveness to Peter. Another time this happened would be the day he ascended into heaven.

Then Jesus appeared to Saint Paul himself. The New International Version has an unusual picture: ***“as to one abnormally born.”*** The King James Version reads this way: ***“And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”*** The real picture here is of a miscarriage. Paul is speaking of himself in this very uncomplimentary way, as an unfit and repulsive-looking creature, one writer said, brought into the world before the proper time. It is great and genuine humility that causes Paul to write this. This is a confession of his own unworthiness.

Saint Paul goes on and explains further: ***“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.”***

Scripture records Saint Paul’s calling as an apostle of Jesus Christ. You heard in our Epistle lesson of the Apostle Paul’s conversion. Jesus appeared and spoke to him in a most unusual way, calling him in this way to follow him, and to proclaim sin and grace, to teach of Jesus’ death and resurrection. The fact that Paul had lived in the blindness of his pharisaic pride and was a blasphemer, a persecutor, always caused him deep distress.

Except for the work of Jesus Christ in bringing him to faith, he had a complete lack of moral qualification and an utter lack of fitness, or competency to be a servant, an apostle of Jesus Christ. But Jesus Christ used him as his servant. Paul assures us ***“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.”*** He says that he worked harder than anyone else proclaiming Jesus Christ, but he really didn’t do it. It was ***“the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.”*** No matter who preaches and proclaims the true gospel of Jesus Christ, it is the gospel that saves, not the person of the one who delivers that message.

Yes, we admit that human witnesses are important. But more important is the grace of God. That is his undeserved love and mercy, delivered to you through his inspired Word.

It is because of that grace of God that sins are forgiven and heaven is opened for us.

For without the grace of God we would be people like the unconverted Saul, the man who gave his approval to the stoning to death of Stephen, the first martyr, because Stephen was witnessing to Jesus Christ. It was totally the grace of God which changed, converted, moved, regenerated, and gave life to Saul, later known as the Apostle Paul.

Paul admitted that he didn’t deserve the mercy of God because he had persecuted and approved the death of believers in Jesus Christ. There was certainly nothing in that man which deserved the goodness of God.

But are we any different? We may not always want to admit it in our hearts that we have sinned by “thought, word, and deed”. But Scripture makes it clear that ***“there is no one who does good, not even one.”*** (Romans 3:12, NIV84) as the Apostle Paul in Romans quotes Psalms and Ecclesiastes.

But we have to marvel at the amazing grace of God. Yes, we know the Bible passage that tells us ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*** (John 3:16–17, NIV84) But sometimes we say and think of that passage so casually that we really forget about the greatness of God’s grace.

He loved each of us, he loved you and had his Son pay the punishment you deserved.

That is grace. That is God’s grace.

It is this same message of grace that we proclaim to you today. That message invites us to repent of our sins, to believe on Jesus in life and in death, and to grow day by day in grace and true holiness. ***“By this gospel you are saved,”*** specifically, ***“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.”*** Believe it! By the grace of God it is the truth and you have heard that truth again today! Amen.