

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fifth Sunday after Easter, May 29, 2011**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 201, 189, 278, 203, 198.

Lessons: Isaiah 49: 1-13, Acts 14:8-18, John 14:23-29.

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

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, listen to an eyewitness, that often makes the event more memorable. Sometimes eyewitnesses are required in court proceedings in order to prove what actually happened. 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:

**CHRIST IS RISEN! HE HAS TRULY BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!**

- 1. Listen! There is eyewitness proof!**
- 2. Even Saint Paul saw him – in a most unusual way.**

Saint Paul has given to the Corinthians and to us again the facts about Jesus: *“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.”* What does that mean? It means, as Saint Paul plainly teaches later in this chapter, that all who believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins will inherit eternal life and rise from the grave on the last day just as Jesus Christ was raised. Then he gives evidence, naming eyewitnesses to the fact.

Our text goes on: *“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.”* We can only read from the scriptures, and we believe they are plainly the Word of God, telling us the truth. But Saint Paul also names some of those who saw the resurrected Jesus Christ. He appeared to Peter. Mark tells us that the women, and he names *“Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome”* were told by the angel *“‘Don’t be alarmed,’ he said. ‘You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”* Mark 16:1-7

In Luke 24:9-12 we read: *“When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.”*

Why is Peter singled out? Probably because he so publicly denied Jesus. The others just ran away. Peter publicly, with cursing and swearing denied even knowing Jesus. Jesus knew that Peter had repented, and Jesus was especially concerned that Peter receive the message of absolution, or forgiveness.

Jesus then appeared to “the twelve”. One 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 – and Peter is mentioned, too – when they were in Galilee. John is the one who plainly records this most clearly, as you heard in our Gospel lesson. 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’ ascending into heaven that one was selected – “called” would be an excellent choice of words – 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 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 small 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 was brought home to me when a once-popular television program had a reunion, and someone mentioned the people who had died who were no longer with the original cast for this “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 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

In thinking of those who had died ***“as children of the resurrection”*** John 20:36, they had closed their eyes to this world, knowing that they would presently be with their Lord forever.

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.”***

That 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 same 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 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 plainly reminded 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"***. One 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 or an abortion. 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 ***"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. 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, 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. He, except for the work of Jesus Christ, 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. He 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.

It is this same message 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.