

**WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, April 2, 2024**  
**Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN**

**“The First Word”**

**READING:** I Corinthians 15:1-8 – 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.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! A Blessed Easter to each and every one of you. What a marvelous day Easter is! Lent and Holy Week with all their gloom, their doleful music, and their sorrow give way to the loud and joyful sounds of celebration and victory. There’s nothing like it. Not even Christmas can match the triumphal pitch of Easter.

Our text for this morning may be more important than you’ve ever imagined. Certainly it’s St. Paul stressing the importance of Jesus’ resurrection to the Christian community. He goes on in the chapter to remind us all that if there is no truth to the Easter story, if Jesus did not physically rise from the dead, then the entire Christian message is humbug and without merit. Then our faith is worthless, and we are still mired in our sins. After this discussion he sounds the triumphal note with these words, “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

What you might not be aware of is that our reading today is widely considered in scholarly ranks as the earliest written attestation of Jesus’ physical resurrection from the dead. You see the learned people think that Paul wrote I Corinthians in 55 A.D. near the end his three-year stay in Ephesus. The best guesses for the writing of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) seem to point to a late 50’s, early 60’s. John is typically considered to have been written in the 70’s or even 80’s. If (and I say, if) the scholars are close to correct, St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is the first written testimony we have of the Resurrection. That makes it an important text to those who want to investigate the Easter story.

St. Paul is the only one to give us a list of the various witnesses to the Resurrection. Look back at his list and ask yourself, “Who is NOT on that list?” The answer is: the Ladies. That’s always of interest to the scholars, for the Gospel writers all give prominence to the women being the first to receive the Good News and even to be the first to see and touch the living Jesus. Paul says nothing about them. Of course the skeptics always veer towards, “Obviously, the early church was at odds over who saw Jesus and hadn’t yet solidified their story.” (To that I say, “Bologna!”)

I think that Paul’s purpose here is to establish his credentials as an evangelist. Having already brought the good news of Christ to the Corinthians, he mentions some of the most well-known and prominent eye-witnesses such as Peter, James, and “The Twelve” before listing his own testimony. He doesn’t need to mention the women because the Corinthians wouldn’t have known them, nor would they bolster his place on the list. Whatever his reasoning, the Gospels all testify to the role of the women on Easter morning.

If Paul did write this letter in 55, we realize he is doing so only some 20-25 years after the Passion and Resurrection took place. There would have been many of the eye-witnesses still living who could attest to his report or contradict it if it was not accurate. Paul is already well aware of the importance of the Easter

message to the salvation offered in Jesus' name. Without the Resurrection there IS NO CHURCH! Without the physical resurrection of Jesus we have no real hope in him. If there was a dead Jesus in some grave on the third day, then the whole thing is a sham and a shame. The skeptics and the unbelievers have always realized this, that's why they so often attack the Resurrection. It is the column on which the Church stands or falls. Thanks be to God that we have eye-witness testimony and the martyrdom of so many of the principal leaders of the Church. That they were willing to die for the Savior attests to their absolute faith in the truth of that Sunday morning. Who is willing to die for a fabrication they know to be a lie?

Jesus lives! Paul knew it. Peter knew it. James knew it. Mary Magdeline knew it. The Twelve knew it. And because they knew it, we know it, too! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia and amen!

**PRAYER:**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

1) Please pray for our Junior Confirmands. Next weekend they participate in their Retreat. On April 21 they will make their good Confessions in the Sunday morning services. And then on the 28<sup>th</sup>, they will be confirmed in the faith in the 10:30 service. Pray for Amelia, Madelyn, Maggie, Breena, Heidi, Knox, Landon, Asa, Kellen, and Lukas as they prepare themselves for the events of this month.