

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: I Cor. 15:1-23

"The Resurrection: It Changes Everything!"

HE IS RISEN!

He is risen! Those three words change everything. Those three words are not mere words but they convey ultimate reality. They reflect the ultimate reality of Who Jesus Is – God in human flesh; What He has done – conquered death, sin, and the devil; Why He has done it - He loves us; and Why it matters – it confronts us with our present and future.

Over 2 billion people on this planet are linked to the Christian faith because of those three words. It is what distinguishes us from every other religion, philosophy, and worldview in life. The moral teachings of Jesus are profound, His life is captivating, and the cross of Christ is challenging and compelling; but it is the resurrection that validates all of the above.

It is what gives us hope and meaning. It reveals why we are here, what is our purpose, and where we are headed. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything. The question, however, remains, how will you let it change you?

How do we let the Resurrection of Jesus Christ change us? Not just like on a day like today when churches around the world are packed, but how do we let it change us every day?

And that's what I want us to look at this morning. Please turn with me to our second reading from **I Cor. 15:1-23**. The Apostle Paul is writing to the young thriving church in the city of Corinth, a coastal cosmopolitan city in Greece. It was also one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire. As a seafaring town it had all sorts of religions and views and peoples. And like any growing church the Corinthians were facing a lot of questions – you name it; they were dealing with it. One was about life after death. In the ancient world almost everyone believed in the afterlife. And as you can imagine there were all sorts of crazy ideas about it. One that wouldn't sound so crazy to us was the belief in the immortality of the soul. That our soul or spirit goes on after our body dies. A lot of people believe this today. But they also believed that the body was bad. Let's face it, we grow old, we get sick and we die. So many people as they do in Eastern religion viewed the body as a problem that it really is holding us back.

And that kind of thinking crept into the Corinthian Church. It is why Paul writes, ***"Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"*** Paul wants to set the record straight because the fact of the matter is that the truth of the resurrection is fundamental to everything in life. Now let's see how he does it.

"Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain." So the gospel which is the good news of Christ was received by the Corinthian believers; they stand on it (it is their foundation), and they are saved by it. They experience salvation as a result of their faith and following the Lord Jesus. That is a sermon in and of itself. But now look at what Paul writes;

he says, ***"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures"***

There is a key phrase that is repeated twice in those verses. It is often overlooked and may even be a bit confusing, but it is essential to understand what Paul is saying here – ***"according to the Scriptures"*** means in fulfillment of the Hebrew Bible – our Old Testament. The Law and the Prophets.

When Jesus came to earth, He did not come out of nowhere. Jesus was born into a Jewish family who had traditions that were over 2000 years old. He didn't come from the sky. He came from a woman – the womb of the Virgin Mary. With human DNA. He was born into the Jewish community that was expecting a special messenger from God, more than a great prophet, the long-awaited Anointed One, the Messiah, promised by God 2000 years prior.

Recall Jesus said in **Matthew 5:17**, that ***I have not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them.*** In other words, everything that God has spoken and revealed to His people Israel would find their completion in Christ.

The death of the Messiah was predicted in **Isaiah 53** but what about His resurrection? One such prophecy is found right here in our **Psalms – 16:8-10**: ***"I have set the LORD continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will dwell securely. For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay."***

What did the demons say to Jesus when they confronted Him? ***What do you have to do with us, O Holy One of God?*** Peter declared in **John 6:69**, ***"We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."*** God made promises concerning the Messiah and they came true in Jesus Christ. And He made promises for all who would believe that those who put their trust in Him would have abundant life and eternal life. Jesus said in **Mt. 11:28**, ***"Come to me all you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest for your souls."*** Jesus said in **Jn. 10:10**, ***"I came that you might have life and have it abundantly."*** And in **John 3:16** Jesus said, ***"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in him might have eternal life."*** Now those are some big promises. Can there be any greater?

But the resurrection was not just Scriptural, it was personal. It was experienced by hundreds of believers first hand. Paul writes, ***"and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also."*** Eyewitness accounts at different times with different people making hallucinations impossible. In fact, the Greek word (*ophthe*) that we translate as appeared does not mean appearance of someone in a vision (*horama*) but the appearance of someone in real life.

So the death and resurrection of Jesus confirmed that He was the long-awaited Messiah of the Jews. There are those who are still waiting for the Messiah; but considering all the prophecies of the Old Testament that have been fulfilled by Christ's coming, you will NEVER find another – only imposters. In fact, Jesus warned us that in the last days there would be many false prophets.

Of course, if Christ had not risen from the dead we would have a problem! You see, while it is true that Christ died on the cross – it is a fact of history - if He did not rise again – He would be a liar, He would be a phony, and worse, we would be a bunch of fools.

In fact, Paul honestly admits when he says in **1 Cor. 15:13-19**: ***“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 14and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. 15Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. 16For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 17and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.”***

Make no mistake, Paul knew if the resurrection was false, then he would be wasting his time. And so would I, and so would you. The truth is the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the one element that makes Christianity not only superior to every other religion, but totally different from every other religion. Someone has rightly said, *"Christianity begins where other religions end: with the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Every other religion of the world can point to a founding father, and they can even point to his grave. But only Christianity points to an empty tomb and says, "Our founder is alive."*

And He is alive because He is one and the same God who made heaven and earth, made you and me in His image. And He has promised to come back again. The implication is far-reaching. We don't have to be searching for meaning and purpose anywhere else. Like Andrew who told Peter after first meeting Jesus, ***“We have found the Messiah. (Jn. 1:41)*** we, too, have found the Lord. We, unlike Pontus Pilate, the Roman governor who after Jesus told him that ***I testify to the truth***, said, ***“What is truth?”*** Now we can say we know WHO is the truth. We now have direction and purpose. And so the resurrection is God's way of getting our mind off ourselves – our weaknesses, our infirmities, our failures - and getting them onto what God has said and done in Christ, and what that means for you and me as His sons and daughters.

That's what the Resurrection does! It gets our eyes off ourselves and our circumstances and onto God and His promises. What is true about each of us? We are frail, foolish, and fickle. And in this life, – there can be much joy but there are many things that bring heartache and sorrow. Evil is not an illusion; it is an ever-present danger. And it is the evil that is in the heart of man that is more dangerous than any bomb or gun. But God has a remedy for the evil of this world and the sin in the human heart. It is His Son. And the fact of the resurrection reminds us that though weeping may spend the night, joy comes in the morning, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for Thou O Lord are with Me, that all things work together for good for those who love the Lord and are called to His purpose; and greater is He Who is in you and me than he who is in the world! Moreover if God be for us, who can be against us! That my brothers and sisters is what the Resurrection does. **It gets our eyes off ourselves and our circumstances and onto God and His promises.**

Second, the reality of the resurrection confirms the power we have in Christ. The same power that raised Jesus from the grave is the same power that dwells in you and me. That power and presence of God is the Holy Spirit. That power manifests in us when we are born again. We are physically alive because of God's power. And we can only be spiritually alive by God's power. Jesus said to Nicodemus ***“Unless you are born again, you cannot enter the Kingdom of God”***. How are we born again? Simply by turning to Jesus by faith

and following Him. Then we have the Holy Spirit. Paul said in **1 Cor. 12:3** that ***"No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit."***

What is the power of being born again? We can be reconciled to God. We can be friends, personally intimate with the Living God – the one who made us in His image. Look again at what Paul tells us, ***"But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive."*** In other words, we are all related to Adam by virtue of his sin and our sin. And we are all related to Christ in that he became like us in all things but He did not sin, rather he bore our sins. And because He dealt with sin, we now can be made alive.

The resurrection testifies to the miracle working power of God, and of not just the supernatural – the blind see, the deaf hear, the lepers are cleansed, the sick are healed, and the dead raised - but even more significant the reality of a changed life where self is no longer in control but God is; that is the greatest miracle of all. And that can only happen when one comes face to face with Jesus and acknowledges him for who He is – the Holy Son of God! And this means walking with him daily. If I am not walking with the Lord daily I will not experience His power. Think about a coach and his or her players. The coach's job is to help a player maximize his or her potential. The only way that will happen is if the players spend time learning from the coach, listen to the coach, and then put what they have learned into practice. There is the power. A good coach will take a team and bring it to the next level; but if the members of the team don't buy into the system they won't achieve their potential. It is no different in the spiritual realm. Christ is our coach. Actually, He is more than our coach – He is our Lord. And if we don't buy into His system, if we don't spend time with him, listen to him and put into practice what He tells us to do, we won't experience His power. The Holy Spirit will be quenched in us.

Finally, the resurrection reminds us that everything we do has significance. You have heard the expression, everything happens for a reason. There is a reason for everything in the plant and animal worlds. Every little microbe and tiniest particle has a role to play. Years ago everyone thought that bacteria was bad. We now know that there is good bacteria, and killing off all the bacteria in your body has negative consequences for our bodies and immune systems. If everything is important in the natural world, how much more so in our interpersonal relationships and in the spiritual realm. We are all in this together. We are not captains of our own or masters of our own fate. We are interconnected and what we do has consequences not only for ourselves but for those around us and for all eternity, I might add.

When Jesus rose from the dead, He did not rise merely in spirit; He rose in a transformed physical body. A body like the one he had born from His mother Mary. A body that had the same form and features. A body that could eat and drink but was not of flesh and blood. It was not limited to the space and time dimensions of our present universe. He could walk through walls. He could defy gravity. He was not limited to the laws of physics. And it is this same body which we have been promised by the Lord. But lest we get too excited, the promise of a new body is not the main point; it is being made fully whole so that we can fully experience all that God has for us. But that process begins now. We are not to simply wait until we die to grow in the faith. We are not simply to wait until we die to grow in our love for the Lord. We are not simply here to wait until we die to share that love with others. It begins now. It continues now. Now is the time for salvation, now is the time for life transformation, now is the time to say He is Risen! And because He is risen, my life has significance and everything I do has significance. So I ask you, on this beautiful Easter Day, "How will you let the Resurrection change your life?" In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!