

## 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

<sup>20</sup>But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup>For since death came by a man, the resurrection of the dead also is going to come by a man. <sup>22</sup>For as in Adam they all die, so also in Christ they all will be made alive. <sup>23</sup>But each in his own order: Christ as the firstfruits and then Christ's people, at his coming. <sup>24</sup>Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has done away with every other ruler and every other authority and power. <sup>25</sup>For he must reign "until he has put all his enemies under his feet." <sup>26</sup>Death is the last enemy to be done away with. <sup>27</sup>Certainly, "he has put all things in subjection under his feet." Now when it says that all things have been put in subjection, obviously that does not include the one who subjected all things to him. <sup>28</sup>But when all things have been subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who subjected all things to him, in order that God may be all in all.

## Resurrection Destination

### I.

Don't you just love Easter? Easter Sunday is sometimes called Resurrection Sunday. It *has* been said and honestly *can* be said that every Sunday is a mini-Easter. What can be more satisfying than to be reminded yet again of the joys of Easter?

There was no satisfaction—no joy—on the actual date of the resurrection. At least, not at first. *Skepticism* was the word of the day.

The women who were among Jesus' closest followers during his lifetime trekked out to the cemetery to finish the burial process that hadn't been completed because of the Sabbath. They were looking for a dead body, not a living Lord.

When they found the empty tomb and some guys in white, the women reported back to the Eleven. "Yet these words seemed to them like nonsense, and they did not believe them" (Luke 24:11, EHV). Skeptics Peter and John headed to the graveside to see for themselves. Finding the empty grave and the burial cloths lying neatly folded: "(They still did not yet understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead.)" <sup>10</sup>Then the disciples went back to their homes" (John 20:9-10, EHV). They didn't understand; they didn't know *what* to think. They just went home.

The same day two disciples who were on their way to Emmaus walked with Jesus and talked with Jesus, but they didn't recognize him. They were confused and skeptical about everything that had happened until, that is, Jesus himself opened their eyes to see and their hearts to understand at the dinner table. They ran back to Jerusalem to report to the rest. It was during their report to the other disciples that Jesus appeared behind locked doors to reassure them and to begin to teach them the things they had failed to understand *before* his crucifixion.

"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20, EHV). Despite the skepticism, it was true—Jesus had risen from the dead! The disciples came to understand and spread the news far and wide.

It is the most important news ever. Christ Jesus did, indeed, die on the cross. It was absolutely necessary. God requires perfection; he always has and he always will. He doesn't ask you to try really hard to do his will, he *demand*s: "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48, EHV).

Failure to be perfect brought the wages of sin that we talked about last week. Here Paul puts it this way: “Death came by a man... <sup>22</sup>For as in Adam they all die” (1 Corinthians 15:21-22, EHV). All people die because they fail to be perfect, as God demands.

Paul’s preaching of the law is so intertwined with the joyous news of the gospel. Sin made necessary the death of the Son of God to pay the penalty required for it. Let’s put these two verses, 21-22, in their proper context. “For since death came by a man, the resurrection of the dead also is going to come by a man. <sup>22</sup>For as in Adam they all die, so also in Christ they all will be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:21-22, EHV).

Jesus died. There was no question. On Good Friday the soldiers broke the legs of the others who were crucified next to Jesus to speed up the process, but they found Jesus already dead. Still, they stuck a spear in his side to make sure he was well and truly dead before they handed his body over for burial.

But he rose. There was a resurrection. Jesus appeared to more than 500 people in the 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension.

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20, EHV). That word “firstfruits” points us to the fact that Easter brings something more along with it.

In the Old Testament, Israel offered the first gathering of wheat as a sacrifice to God. They *knew* the entire harvest would soon be gathered. God required them to bring the first sheaves of grain as an offering to him, trusting that he would bless them with the rest of the harvest.

## II.

“Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Remember the euphemisms for death from last week? Using “fallen asleep” for death reminds us that death is temporary.

*Jesus* rose from the dead, but he is not going to be the only one. Just as Israel was to trust God to bless them as they brought in the *whole* harvest, so believers trust God when he says that Jesus is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep in the sleep of death.

“In Christ they all will be made alive. <sup>23</sup>But each in his own order: Christ as the firstfruits and then Christ’s people, at his coming” (1 Corinthians 15:22-23, EHV). In Greek, Jesus’ coming is “parousia.” It is a word used for the arrival of dignitaries. Christ will be coming as the King of kings. He will be coming on the clouds. It will be the arrival of the greatest dignitary. The full harvest of the resurrection will take place when the firstfruits of the resurrection, Jesus, comes as the dignitary King to raise all people from the dead.

This Last Sunday of End Time, the last Sunday of the Church Year, reminds us that on Judgment Day Jesus will be returning to gather in the harvest of souls. As glorious as Easter Sunday was and is, it is the *beginning*, not the ending; it is the firstfruits. Jesus gives the certain hope of eternal life with him to all who believe.

## III.

“Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has done away with every other ruler and every other authority and power” (1 Corinthians 15:24, EHV). Then comes the end. For us, the end marks the beginning.

The end which comes means that Jesus will have done away with every other ruler and every authority and power. Paul once said: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12, EHV). All those

will be ended with Judgment Day. There will be no more struggle against such powerful forces, for their ultimate powerlessness will be revealed at the powerful return of the real King. On Judgment Day it will be clear that Christ has destroyed every other evil force in the world that opposes him. He has not just brought them under control, but has completely done away with these enemies. No longer do we have anything to fear from them.

“For he must reign ‘until he has put all his enemies under his feet.’ <sup>26</sup>Death is the last enemy to be done away with” (1 Corinthians 15:25-26, EHV). Death is just a part of life; that is what we have been told. Death is natural, right? Wrong!

Death is the last enemy. Death was added to the world as a result of sin. Death is the last-fruits of sin.

Christ, the firstfruits of life, changes the end of the story. There is a resurrection destination.

#### IV.

“Certainly, ‘he has put all things in subjection under his feet.’ Now when it says that all things have been put in subjection, obviously that does not include the one who subjected all things to him” (1 Corinthians 15:27, EHV). Paul quotes Psalm 8:6 when he says that all things are under Jesus’ feet. There is one exception: God himself is *not* “under Jesus’ feet.” The exception makes the rule all the more emphatic: there is nothing that Jesus cannot and does not control, other than God himself.

“But when all things have been subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who subjected all things to him, in order that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28, EHV). Paul peeks into eternity to the Kingdom of Glory. So utterly and completely has every last enemy been defeated that none of them can ever show themselves again in God’s presence. They are judged.

God the Son lays the whole completed mission assigned to him at the feet of the God the Father and by this act subjects himself to the Father. God—not merely one person, but the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are “all in all” in eternity.

There, at our resurrection destination, God will be our all in all. We will not need food or clothing or shelter, for God will be our all in all. We will not need comfort or relationships, for God will be our all in all. We will not need protection or deliverance, for God will be our all in all.

This is the destination to which Easter always has been headed. Jesus is our firstfruits, and the firstfruits of all who have already fallen asleep. On the last Sunday of the Church Year, a blessed Easter fulfillment to you. Amen.