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1 Corinthians 15:1-11

January 30, 2022

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Prepared for:  Lutheran Church of Our Saviour, Greenville SC

* “I remind you of the good news that I proclaimed to you…through which you are being saved: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve….”
  + It appears that, in addition to other conflicts within the Corinthian church, there were some who were questioning whether the Resurrection was real.
    - It’s likely that, although they believed in ***a*** resurrection, they understood it as a spiritual one.
      * Something like the change many/most of them had experienced when they converted to Christianity.
  + Important: Many of the Corinthian Christians were not historically Israelite/Jewish.
    - They would have been unfamiliar with the historic scripture of that faith.
      * Scripture that foretold the coming of the Messiah.
      * Scripture that promised a suffering servant.
      * Scripture that prophesied that Messiah’s death and resurrection.
    - Without that background, Jesus could easily have been perceived by the newcomers as some sort of new, “upstart” god.
    - St. Paul references the canon of Israelite scripture to help them understand that, although God has done something new and astonishing in raising Jesus from death, this was an act prophesied long ago.
* I’m a preemie mom. Jason was born six weeks before his due date, and spent his first few days of life in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.
  + He needed an incubator to keep him alive.
    - Oxygen
    - Body heat.
  + And the truth is that, if he’d been born a few centuries earlier, he would not have survived.
* Relevance? The language used in chapter fifteen of St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians.
  + “Last of all, as to one untimely born, [Jesus] appeared also to me.”
  + The nuance of this language is lost in translation to English. St. Paul is referring to himself as if he were a premature infant.
    - Roughly fifty percent of full-term babies did not survive beyond the first ten years of life.
    - Premature infants in the first century did not survive. Period.
  + Paul is, in essence, describing his own resurrection experience.
    - And he’s using his experience to try and connect with the people to whom he is writing.
* Paul wasn’t literally born prematurely. If he had been, he wouldn’t have survived.
  + But the language he uses, language translated here as, “Last of all, as to one untimely born, [Jesus] appeared also to me…,” is language that is used with regard to premature birth or, in some cases, even to a miscarriage.
    - In other words, prior to his encounter with the risen Lord, St. Paul was dead.
      * Proof of that? He wasn’t simply an unbeliever, he was a persecutor of Christians.
        + Not even slightly worthy of attention from the Savior.
  + But for reasons beyond his comprehension, Jesus did come to him. And St. Paul calls that grace.
* St. Paul travels, preaching and teaching about the resurrected Lord, because he has firsthand experience with grace. He has firsthand experience with love. He has firsthand experience with forgiveness.
  + St. Paul isn’t preaching anything they haven’t heard before.
  + “I remind you….”
    - “That Christ died for our sins…, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day.”
* You’ve heard this before, haven’t you?
  + So had the Corinthians. Still, they needed to hear it anew.
  + You’re here now because, just like those Corinthians, you need to hear it anew.
  + Again. And again. And again.
  + Because, let’s face it, all of us are like St. Paul. “Untimely born.”
    - Unlike St. Paul, though, we haven’t had the privilege of coming face-to-face with the resurrected Lord.
      * Or maybe you have, but haven’t told your pastors?
  + So let me say it one more time: Christ died for our sins. For your sins. For mine. Dead, he was placed in a grave. Three days later, he was alive.
    - This is our faith. Amen.