

## 1 Corinthians 15:1-20 (from *The Message*)

### Trusting the Proclamation

I have to admit, this is a tough one. I can usually come up with some sort of sermon illustration to get us warmed up to whatever topic a sermon is going to be about, but this one scripture just doesn't seem to lend itself well to some sort of story to make a point. I think it is because the topic is one defies reason or scientific proof. This scripture is based in conviction. Not blind following or trust, but a conviction based in experience, that of Paul, that of the earliest Christians who gave us the New Testament, and based in our own lived experience of God at work in the world.

Now, you heard verses 1-20 of chapter 15 in order that you would have the basis for what the sermon is going to focus on. Last week I preached on verses 1-11, so if you want a reminder, you can go back and look at that sermon, but it has been read today so that you have Paul's preamble to where he is going in the next part of the scripture. Without the first verses, which assert that Jesus was raised from the dead and lists a lot of people who saw Jesus in his resurrected body, then what I am about to talk about now would appear to be coming out of nowhere. Verse 11 sets us up, "We spoke God's truth and you entrusted your lives" or as another translation of scripture says, "Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe." (NRSV)

Basically, Christ's resurrection has been proclaimed and believed and now we are to live into that truth. No one that Paul was writing to at the time is needing to be convinced that Jesus was raised from the dead. That was actually pretty easy for them to believe. Eye witness accounts were still able to be confirmed at the time that Paul wrote the letter. As well, many of the new believers in Corinth were people who believed in heroes and many small "g" gods with power. Paul Brown notes, "It was only the heroes, the ones who were worshiped and sometimes immortalized bodily, who attained a special destiny and thus, the Corinthians could deny their own future resurrection while still embracing the resurrection and worship of Jesus, the Messiah, as one with hero status."<sup>1</sup>

And that was the problem. The Corinthians could believe in Jesus as having been resurrected; their problem was that some could not get their heads around the fact that Christ's resurrection was a promise of their own resurrection. It is interesting that in our day and age, more people would probably attest that their bodies will be able to go on in

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, *Bodily Resurrection and Ethics in 1 Cor 15*, 94.

another form and deny Jesus' resurrection, but that was not the challenge then, and for many now, it is all a conundrum.

For Paul though, this is all fact and it is based in what he has witness in his own life and in the lives of countless others. Life breathed in anew when one believes that Jesus' resurrection is the promise of new life for us now and in our dying. Paul's point is that our resurrection and that of Jesus is inextricably linked. God choose to come to earth in flesh and blood so that we would be connected in ways that could not have been if that had not happened. Unlike other gods, our God is with us because of love, not because of power. We are not pawns in God's game of life, but rather players who have the ability to make decisions about how we will live our lives. The hope being that the love of God as shown in Jesus' life, death and resurrection, we be the guiding light for our own lives.

Still, how Paul goes about writing on this is all from a pretty negative stance at this point in the scripture...

If there's no resurrection, there's no living Christ. And face it—if there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors. Not only that, but we would be guilty of telling a string of barefaced lies about God, all these affidavits we passed on to you verifying that God raised up Christ—sheer fabrications, if there's no resurrection.

<sup>16-20</sup> If corpses can't be raised, then Christ wasn't, because he was indeed dead. And if Christ weren't raised, then all you're doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever. It's even worse for those who died hoping in Christ and resurrection, because they're already in their graves. If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot.<sup>2</sup>

I for one would be one of those “pretty sorry lot” as I have given my life to preaching the gospel, of telling people what I have come to believe, and sharing that my life has been hugely impacted and changed, transformed really, by the belief that Jesus was raised from the dead and that means you and I will be too. I have left family and work, moved to a completely different place in Canada then I would have ever thought I would go, because I am so convinced of the power of God to change lives...for people to live abundant lives...because of the resurrection power of God to raise Jesus from the dead and that means you and I can be too.

Being raised to life means we are able to lead an abundant and amazing life now, and to be in the presence of Godself in our physical dying. It does not mean that we are free from danger, or illness, brokenness and pain, but it does mean that we can live through them in hope, grace, and the promise that those things do not have the final say. Jesus has the final say, and his promise...God's promise...is that of life.

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<sup>2</sup> [The Message \(MSG\)](#) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by [Eugene H. Peterson](#)

And Paul says that it is our work to proclaim the promise of new life, a transformed life, to any and all who will listen. We proclaim in words and in deeds. We proclaim when we tell people that we know Jesus through scriptures and lived experience. We proclaim the Good News of Jesus when by our actions, our generosity, and by our love, people experience the grace of God.

Jeffrey Jones writes,

The great insight of this passage is that the two are intimately linked together. Belief in Christ's resurrection provides reason to have faith in our own. Faith in our own resurrection provides reason to believe in Christ's. There is something other than rational argument at work here, for the very nature of resurrection defies reason. It is, rather, an experientially based conviction... We believe, not because of any inherent logic, but because our acceptance of that conviction opens us to the wonder and power of God at work. It moves us beyond the rational and scientific so that we begin to see with eyes of faith... The power of the resurrection is the power to transform this life and bring us to eternal life. Once again, the two are intimately connected. The reality of one assures us of the reality of the other.<sup>3</sup>

Today's is not about convincing you of anything, but maybe giving you reason to consider your belief. Why you believe and what you believe. To hear Paul's words that talk about faith and about the promises of God. Jesus' resurrection was the first fruits of the harvest, an agricultural analogy about what God is up to in the world.

In a time in our society when so much is in question, when we are witnessing various ways of leading people and ways leaders abuse their power, of certain people taking and having control over the lives of others, God's story is one power as well, but it is the power of love, hope, grace, and promise. May our story be one that shows what God's power looks like in the world for the sake of the world and for the love of God. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Copenhagen Martin B. *Feasting on the Word: Year c Volume 1 Advent through Transfiguration*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2009. P353, 355.