

“The Resurrection Affect” GPPC 2-10-19  
Psalm 138, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Last Sunday, in chapter 13 of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians we heard Paul call for love to permeate, motivate, and be the end goal of all the gifts. In chapter 14, Paul returns to the subject of gifts, speaking in tongues, and prophecy.

But today, in chapter 15, Paul makes an abrupt change of subject. And reaches the culmination of his entire letter. What does he talk about? The resurrection. Paul spends the entire chapter talking about the resurrection. (After the service, take a few minutes and read over chapter 15 carefully. See what you notice that you had not noticed before).

“Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters,” Paul says, “of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved...”

There’s a lot to unpack in this one long sentence, isn’t there? First, a reminder—Paul is proclaiming good news. Well, duh! That seems obvious, but after he’s spent several chapters pushing and prodding the Corinthians (and us) to think, speak, and behave more faithfully, it’s

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easy to forget. The Corinthians and the Guilford Parkians and human beings have received good news! And what sort of good news have the Corinthians and we received?

The *saving* kind of good news.

As Paul says, “the good news...through which also you are being saved...”

“Being saved”--what might Paul mean? If you look up the Greek word for “saved” it means to be rescued, saved from danger and death, including eternal death. Of course, when you think about all the Christians who’ve died for their faith, we figure Paul does not mean saving ourselves from physical harm here. He means something else.

And here is what’s fascinating to me. If we go all the way back to the *Hebrew* word for saved, that word actually carries the sense not only of deliverance but of being roomy, made wide and spacious, to live in abundance. So to be saved is to be given a new quality of life not just when our time on earth ends, but right now. Instead of constricted and oppressed living, salvation means wide, spacious, abundant living.

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In fact, Presbyterians like to say we experience a double saving—for service and for salvation. If we could imagine a conversation, God says to every Christian, “Guess what. You’re it!”

“Who, me?”

“Yeah, you. I’m calling and empowering you to serve me by loving your neighbor as yourself, loving your enemy, caring for the creation, and telling the good news of my love for the world. You’re it!”

“But I thought I was saved for some privilege I could brag about, at least a little bit.”

“Nope. You’re saved for service, and you’re saved for salvation, that is to be with me for eternity.”

“Well, does that mean that other people won’t get to be with you for eternity?”

“That’s none of your business. Let me concerned with the final destination of other people. Your business is to serve me and tell the good news, and to trust everybody else to my perfect justice and infinite love. Who do you think you are anyway, God?”

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Paul even says we are “being saved” and he says “Christ died for our sins.” In other words, as God works in us and we live out our response to God, we begin to experience salvation now—greater, roomier, fuller lives focused beyond our little selves in order to serve God’s grand, but needy world. As the preacher William Sloane Coffin put it, “Love measures our stature: the more we love, the bigger we are. There is no smaller package in all the world than that of a [person] all wrapped up in himself!” (William Sloane Coffin, *Credo*, 24.)

And as we accept that Christ died for our sins, then we can begin to let go of our anxious and frantic need to be good enough or to feel remorseful enough or say we’re sorry enough for the mistakes we’ve made.

In his sermon titled “You Are Accepted” theologian Paul Tillich views sin as separation from God. But God’s grace, he reminds us, reestablishes the relationship. Tillich says, “Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we walk through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life....It strikes us when, year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when the old

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compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage. Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: ‘You are accepted. *You are accepted*, accepted by that which is greater than you...Do not try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much. Do not seek for anything; do not perform anything; do not intend anything. *Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!*’” (Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations*, 161-162.)

To borrow Paul’s language, we are a “being saved” people who can live knowing we are completely forgiven and utterly loved. We are accepted. And we are a “being saved” people who are given direction, purpose, and joy for the living of our lives.

It all comes from the resurrection; the resurrection affects our entire life. The resurrection is not a little add-on to the Christian faith. A pleasant bit of wishful thinking. No. The resurrection is central. Without the resurrection, the Christian faith would have quickly vanished 2000 years ago. But our faith rests upon the resurrection.

So Paul explains that he is merely sharing the good news he has already received, a treasure not of his own making. Jesus really died. He was really buried. And he was really raised in a new form of existence, an existence in which he appeared in time and space, but was no longer bound by time and space. He was recognizable, yet different from before. He joined with the community of believers, but he also maintained his distinctiveness and separateness. He is the forerunner of what we Christians hope for, not a sentimental memory, but a new existence, and a wonderful life together.

Paul says Jesus was encountered in this new existence first by Cephas (Peter), then by the twelve, then by more than 500 followers, then by James, then by the apostles, and then finally by Paul.

And then Paul uses a graphic and shocking image to describe himself. He says, “Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me.” “Untimely born” is a charitable translation of the Greek word that means “miscarriage” or “abortion.” So why in the world would Paul refer to himself this way? He says, “Because I am the least of the

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apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

So Paul sees himself as “untimely born,” the least of the apostles, because he was not merely indifferent to the church, he was actually an enemy of it.

But God’s grace in the resurrected Jesus has overflowed and overwhelmed Paul. Because his behavior was so awful, God’s grace has humbled Paul and it has made even more thankful and more hard-working in response. This has been the affect of the resurrection in his life.

This still happens, you know. Sometimes when we least expect it, we’re filled with gratitude for what God has done and is doing for us. We let go of some of our pride. We’re humbled not merely by our own sins but by God’s love in forgiving us. So we set aside our excuses in order to respond with worship and service as our thanksgiving. And we lose some (or even all) of our fear of death.

A pastor tells about visiting an older woman from his church in the hospital. She had been having terrible abdominal pain for some time,

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and the doctors had not been able to diagnose it. So the pastor went to her room to read some scripture and pray with her. He read from the Psalms, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...” And the pastor writes, “She closed her eyes and allowed the words to seep into the familiar places of her soul. After I finished reading she told me that the doctor had visited her a little earlier and explained what her diagnosis was. ‘Lymphoma,’ he said, ‘rather advanced.’ But she was feeling relieved because it meant that there would not need to be any surgery in her weakened condition and she was thankful for the good care that she was getting.”

The woman hoped to go home for her last days.

“She smiled and went on, ‘I wish you’d been here earlier. The doctor came to see me with three handsome young interns in tow. They told me their names and each one checked me over, and then the doctor said to me, ‘Maybe you would like to share with these young men something that they should know as doctors, especially in light of your faith, and what I’ve just told you.’

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“She said, ‘I hardly knew what to say. It seemed like it was so important. Here I was in this bed and I was supposed to say something that these young doctors could remember. I didn’t think I had anything to say, so I just said, ‘Somehow I trust that whatever happens to me I will be in God’s hands, and that gives me hope. Whatever happens, I will be all right.’”

“And then she looked at me and said, ‘I wish you’d been here. You would have said it so much better than I could.’”

“And I looked at her and I said, ‘No, I couldn’t. I couldn’t have said it any better at all.’” (Thomas G. Long, *Accompany Them with Singing: The Christian Funeral*, 112-113.)

We are accepted. We are a being saved people. We will be in God’s hands and we will be all right. Such is the power of the resurrection. Amen. ©Jeff Paschal