Something Must Have Happened Here!
1 Corinthians 15:1-12, 20

A few years ago I took my family to see the Grand Canyon. I'll never forget my reaction when I stepped from the tour bus and first laid eyes on that magnificent sight. "OMG!" I said, "This is why they call it grand!" I think I must have felt a bit like that old fellow who, upon seeing the Grand Canyon for the very first time, was so overwhelmed by the enormity of it that he exclaimed, "Something must have happened here!" Indeed, something momentous must have happened to create such a crevice in the earth.

And as I look around this morning and see so many here, and so many around the world gathering for Christian worship, I can't help saying the same thing. "Something must have happened here!" Indeed, something momentous must have happened to explain your presence, my presence, our presence in service this morning. What was it? It was Easter! It was the Resurrection of Jesus Christ! Without the resurrection, we wouldn't be here today. The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:17, "If Christ has not been raised, our faith is futile."

Yes, something must have happened to alter the course of human history. That something was and is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul talks about Jesus' resurrection. And from his words we learn that the resurrection is an historic event, a continuing event, a transforming event, and a saving event.

First, Paul reminds us that the resurrection is an historic event. It is not a fanciful fable. It is not a made-up myth. It is not a tall tale or a clever lie. It actually happened and it happened in history. Paul makes the case in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7. "For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received; that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas (that's the apostle Peter, the leader of the Twelve apostles, those men closest to Jesus Christ), then to the twelve (minus, of course, Judas the betrayer who was no longer with them). Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time (this probably refers to a crowd that gathered in Galilee to witness Jesus' ascension into heaven), most of whom are still alive, though some have died (Paul adds this as if to say – "If you don't believe me – look them up and ask them – most of them are still alive. They'll tell you all about it!"). Then he appeared to James (the half-brother of Jesus who, by the way, was not inclined to believe in Jesus prior to the resurrection because he thought his brother was a little bit crazy according to Mark 3:20-21), then to all of the apostles (this probably refers to others who had accompanied Christ from his baptism to his resurrection – see Acts 1:21-22)."

Yes, Paul lays out the evidence for the resurrection. He says the resurrection was an historical event with hundreds of witnesses willing to testify that it actually occurred! And there is other historical evidence also. There's the evidence of the Christian
Church. What happened to create it two thousand years ago? The resurrection – that’s what happened! Then there’s the evidence of the Christian day. Why do we worship on Sunday and not on Saturday as our Jewish friends? Because Sunday is the day of Jesus’ resurrection. Then there’s the evidence of the Christian book – the New Testament. Why was it written? It was written to proclaim the resurrection. Then there’s the evidence of the empty tomb. What happened to the body of Jesus Christ? Jesus was either raised from the dead, his friends stole his body, or his enemies took possession of it. But why would his friends die for a lie? If they took his body, why did they sacrifice everything, including life itself, to promulgate a fairy tale? It doesn’t make sense. And why would his enemies conceal his body if they had possession of it. They could have smothered the infant Church early in its cradle by simply producing the corpse of Christ; but they didn’t do it because they didn’t have it.

You see the resurrection happened. It’s an historical event! But it’s more than that. It’s a continuing event. In other words, because of the resurrection, Jesus lives; and because he lives, people can encounter him even still today. We see the continuing nature of the resurrection in the experience of the apostle Paul. Notice 1 Corinthians 15:8-9. After identifying the hundreds of people who witnessed the risen Christ, Paul says, “Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called and apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

As you may know, Paul was an ardent enemy of Christ. He opposed the Church and persecuted it with great ferocity. He was on his way to Damascus to persecute the church in that city when he encountered the risen Christ. Acts 9:3-6 describes the scene. The Bible says, “Now as (Paul) was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul (that was Paul’s Jewish name), Saul, why do you persecute me?’ He asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The reply came, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.’”

Now the significant thing about this event is its timing. This event occurred no less than one year after Jesus’ ascended into heaven and maybe as many as six or seven! You see, the resurrection was and is a continuing event. Because of the resurrection, Jesus lives; and because he lives, people continue to encounter him long after he first appeared to his disciples on that first Easter morn.

This morning we’ll baptize six and confirm four in the Christian faith and all of them can testify that they have encountered the risen Christ. And I’m going to go out on a limb this morning. I’m going to ask you to do something. Please don’t raise your hand just because someone else does, but if you’ve encountered the risen Christ, if you know he lives, and if, as the old song says, he walks with you and talks with you and tells you that you are his own, then I want you to raise your hand. My friends look around. Those hands testify to the fact that Jesus is alive today. The resurrection is more than
an historical event. It’s a continuing event! Because he lives, you can meet him. Have you met him? You can. He’s here today. He said where two are three are gathered in his name, he is there among them. (Mt. 18:20) And when you meet him, he’ll change your life. He’ll change your life for good and forever! And he'll change your life for good and forever because the resurrection is not only an historical event and a continuing event, it’s a transforming event and a saving event.

You see, the resurrection is a transforming event. Paul’s life was changed after he encountered the risen Christ. Notice 1 Corinthians 15:8-10. Paul says, “Last of all, as to one untimely born, (Christ) appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called and apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them (that’s the other apostles) – though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”

You see, the risen Christ transformed Paul’s life. He went from being and ardent enemy to become an ardent ally, an ardent apostle, an ardent and faithful follower of Jesus Christ – and he worked harder than any of the others to make Christ known throughout the world! That was the impact of Jesus on Paul’s life. That’s the impact of Jesus on everyone who meets, greets, and receives him.

Friends, I’m going to embarrass my wife for a moment, just because I can! Thirty-one years ago this past Wednesday, my wife and I went on our very first date. Do you remember what Wednesday was? It was April Fools' Day! And I’ve been a fool for her ever since! The truth of the matter is this: I’m a better man because I met her. I’m a better man because she’s a better person. She truly is my better half. Her influence on me has been wholly positive. Yes, I’m a better man because I love and am loved by a better person. And her love lifts me!

The same can be said for all who love Jesus and are loved by him. He’s not just a better man, he’s the Perfect Person! He’s the Son of God! When you meet, greet, welcome, love him and are loved by him then he transforms your life for good and forever! And so the resurrection is a transforming event!

Finally, it’s a saving event. The risen Christ not only transforms your life for good, he transforms your life forever! He saves you from eternal death and raises you to eternal life. Notice 1 Corinthians 15:12 and 20. Paul says, “Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?...But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.”

Paul says Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. You see in Judaism – and Paul was a Jew who converted to Christ – the first fruits, the first of the harvest, was presented to God on the day after Passover – Easter day in the
Christian calendar – as a sign that the rest of the harvest was coming and that it all belonged to God. So you see Jesus’ resurrection is the promise that we will be resurrected to live with God forever **IF** we believe in Jesus Christ.

Notice how Paul begins this passage. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-3 Paul says, “I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which you also stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you – unless you have come to believe in vain.”

My friend, if you believe the good news about Jesus that I’ve just preached, if you receive it, stand on it, and hold fast to it, then you will be saved – saved from eternal death and raised to eternal life!

It all depends on faith. But true faith isn’t casual belief. Notice that Paul says you have to receive it. In the original Greek, this word means you must reach out, grab the good news about Jesus, and claim it for your own. Then you must stand on it and not drift away from it. And finally you must hold onto it firmly so you it doesn’t slip from your grip. No, this isn’t casual belief. It isn’t easy believism. It isn’t head knowledge devoid of a true heart’s commitment. It’s committed faith in Jesus Christ – grabbing, standing, holding, believing! When you believe like that then you’ll be saved! Saved from eternal death. Saved for eternal life. Saved through resurrection with Jesus Christ!

My friend, are you saved by the risen and conquering Son? Jesus was raised from the dead – it’s an historical fact. He’s alive today by the power of that resurrection. And he can transform your life for good and forever if only you believe. Will you? Will you? You think about that as we baptize and confirm these who have placed their faith in the risen and conquering Son. Won’t you place your faith in Jesus too? Today is the day of salvation! Amen.