

The 4th Sunday of End Time – Christ the King  
November 23, 2008

Pastor Michael Ewart  
Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 15:19-24

### **Christ Our King is Risen!**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The average American these days doesn't have a lot of hope for the future... at least economically speaking. The country appears to be in a deep recession. Unemployment is rising rapidly. Houses are dropping in value. Any saving invested in stocks and mutual funds have been hammered. The current crisis has cost a total of about \$6 trillion dollars in lost equity. And it seems there is no end to the downward spiral. Hope and optimism are in terribly short supply these days. A lot of people are pinning their hopes for the future on our President-elect, Barack Obama. They feel he is the leader that will restore stability and return prosperity. And I want to tell you today, that I have hope for the future. I am extremely optimistic! But it has nothing to do with our next president, and I really have no clue what will happen next with our economy.

I have a much greater message of hope for you today. One that allows you to look beyond the stock market, your employment situation, and any other problem that might be bringing you down. The hope you will receive today is infinitely (literally!) more important than any kind of hopes you may have for your earthly existence. It is my prayer that you receive this sure and living hope today from our sermon text recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:19-24. We read:

**"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power."**

The Corinthian congregation to which Paul wrote was a congregation that had some huge issues... some really big problems and sins that needed to be addressed. I won't ruin it for you, take some time this week to read 1 Corinthians, or at least skim it and see kind of problems were in that church. One issue, though, that we do want to talk about was their beliefs about the resurrection. Some of the members there believed there was no resurrection from the dead. They believed that once you died you were dead and you weren't coming back.

On the one hand we're floored that a Christian congregation could have such a problem. Can you imagine a controversy breaking out in our church where a good portion of the members announced that there was no resurrection? On the other hand, we can kind of understand why this was a teaching that was difficult for them to believe. Science and all our experiences tell us the people don't rise from the dead. Even tabloid magazines that report on alien abductions to rarely if ever report alleged cases of resurrection from the dead. Even they know there is a limit to what readers will consider credible.

Truth is, more and more churches today are abandoning a faith in the resurrection from the dead. Instead they identify a spiritual resurrection... a coming to life right now where you live to serve God and help others. That is the only resurrection you can expect, they teach.

Paul spoke very directly about this kind of false teaching: **“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.”** In other words if our faith in Christ is only for hope and blessings in this world in our present lives, then out of all the people in the world, Christians should be pitied the most. Paul had two reasons for saying this.

First of all, for the Corinthians, being a Christian had no earthly advantage. In fact, if you were a Christian, you were persecuted, you were often alienated from family and friends, and it often meant you would live in poverty. There were very few tangible benefits to being a Christian. You'd have to be pretty stupid to be a Christian if you only had a hope for this life.

His second reason for saying we should be pitied most is that our whole religion revolves around the resurrection. If Christ hasn't risen, we are still in our sins; we have no forgiveness. If we're still in our sins, then our foundational beliefs are critically eroded and the whole structure of our faith would topple. We'd be left with nothing to believe in if there were no resurrection.

Now, what does Christ's resurrection have to do with forgiveness of sins? I think normally if someone would ask, "How do you know your sins are forgiven?" you might answer something like, "Jesus lived a perfect life for me. Jesus suffered and died for my sins." That's not a bad answer, but perhaps it's not complete. What about the resurrection? Where does that fit into the picture?

To answer that question, we must go all the way back to the Garden of Eden. In that Garden, the first sin ever committed by human beings took place. Adam and Eve rebelled against the perfect, holy and almighty Creator. And what was God's reaction to that sin? God, the righteous judge, demanded sin be punished. And he declared that the punishment for sin would be death. That's why Paul writes that **“death came through a man”** -- namely through Adam's act of rebellion. Now, all who are in Adam, namely all human beings, since we are all Adam's descendants, are subject to die eternally for sin. That is, all who live in the rebellion against God and sin which Adam introduced into the world, are subject to God's punishment for sin -- death. The moment Adam sinned, all mankind was taken captive by Satan... a powerful enemy. Sin and death also began their rule.

Today is the last Sunday of the church year. It's called: “Christ the King” Sunday. Numerous times in Scripture, Jesus is called a King. From what I just described, we see a King is necessary who will defeat our enemies and give us the victory. Jesus is that King.

The kind of King we need to rescue us is one who doesn't live in rebellion against God as we do. That's Jesus. As true God and true man, he kept all of God's will perfectly. God, the righteous judge, could have welcomed his Son back into heaven. The punishment of death shouldn't have applied to the righteous Son. And yet Jesus died, as our Gospel lesson reminded us. Christ the King is mocked and led to a cross to die. Not typically what we consider royal work. But you know why he was there

He was on that cross because God, the all loving Father, placed the sins of the whole world on his Son Jesus. The sins of you and me and every human being who has ever lived and will ever live were put on Jesus. Because of this, God the righteous Judge had to condemn his Son. He pronounced his Son guilty, and sentenced him to death.

Now here is where we see why the resurrection is so important. Let's pretend for a moment that Jesus didn't rise from the dead. That means we have a dead king. Last I checked the history book, kings that died while fighting their enemies were always conquered kings, right? The successful, victorious kings, were not the ones lying dead on the battlefield.

Well, what if Jesus, our King, remains dead on the battlefield. Bearing our sin, he dies and that's the end? If Jesus didn't rise, than he's still being punished for sin, and the price for sin

hasn't been paid. Satan won. Death still rules the day. That's why Paul wrote in verse 17, "**If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.**"

But Jesus did rise. God raised Jesus to life because the sentence had been carried out. Jesus had suffered hell, and had paid in full the penalty for the sins of the world. He proved it by rising from the dead and walking out of the grave. Sin was left in that grave. Satan was defeated. Death has no hold! Our King proved that victory was his... and therefore ours as well.

So if someone asks you, "How were your sins forgiven?" Certainly it's through Christ's suffering and death, but don't forget the whole reason we know their forgiven. It's because the one who paid the penalty for the sins is no longer paying the penalty. Jesus was raised to life again because the heavenly Father accepted his payment for the sins of the world. As a result, we no longer receive the death sentence for sin. We've been acquitted on all counts because a substitute took our place.

Not only does a risen Savior assure us our sins are forgiven, but it also gives us the sure and living hope that because he rose, we also will rise from the dead. And friends, if you've ever been to a Christian funeral, you know the immeasurable comfort and joy the risen Savior can give when a loved one dies. And also when your own death draws near.

Now I'm not saying death isn't scary. I'm not saying the death of a loved one isn't painful. Death is seldom pleasant, nor eagerly anticipated, nor welcomed. And as far as I can tell, death is always tragic. You know, I've never quite understood why you sometimes hear that on the news how someone "tragically" died in a car accident or something. Is there any death that isn't tragic? If some are tragic, are others fortunate? I don't know about you, but every time someone I've known has died, it has torn me up inside. Each time I can't help but realize just how serious sin is that God would condemn each human being to eventually die. However, because of Christ, the death of a believer is by no means a hopeless death, nor the end of the believer's life.

When I was still in college, at Christmas time one year, my Grandmother was dying of cancer. When we knew she only had a couple weeks to live, we made the trip to Phoenix to be with her. Because of the holidays, the whole extended family was there. I still remember vividly... when my Grandma died, most of us were at my uncle's house. My uncle came into the room where we all were gathered, and he announced to us, "Grandma has gone to be with the angels in heaven." It's the wording he used that I remember so clearly. I'm sure you've heard similar: "He's gone to be with the Lord." "She's received the crown of life." And similar things. Some would say those are euphemisms. A soft way of speaking about something terrible. Friends, it's not a euphemism... it's a fact. It's a clear confession of the sure hope we have knowing that our Savior is risen.

And that's not even all! There is more good news! The apostle Paul wrote: "**Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**" Firstfruits isn't a term you hear much today. But Paul's readers would have been very familiar with what that meant. You see, firstfruits were the first part of the harvest that was given as an offering to God. Before the whole harvest was even in, that first portion was given to the Lord, trusting the rest of the crop would be harvested. In the same way, Christ's resurrection was the firstfruits, guaranteeing that all who die in him will be raised in him, just as he rose. As surely as our Savior rose, we also will rise from the dead to spend an eternity in heaven with our gracious heavenly Father.

Because of this hope we have, my Grandma's funeral wasn't a funeral filled with hopelessness and despair. Rather, I remember it was a service which filled me with hope, and even joy. Certainly there was crying, and sorrow. But tears were shed because my Grandma would be dearly missed on this earth. But there was also true happiness -- happiness in knowing her soul was in heaven with Jesus and the pain and suffering was over. Joy in knowing that the body lying in the casket would one day rise in glory to be reunited with her soul in heaven. And joy in knowing that one day we would be reunited with her in heaven.

Friends, do you live every day in the sure and living hope of the resurrection? Is our joy evident in our daily lives? Or do we sometimes have moments of weakness and doubt?

Even the strongest believer can sometimes lose sight of this glorious comfort. One week Martin Luther was depressed. After several days of his bad moods, Katie Luther, Martin Luther's wife, had an idea: She dressed all in black and went around the house crying inconsolably. When Luther heard her, he rushed to her side and asked, "Katie, what's wrong?" "It's my Lord!" She answered between sobs. "My Lord, Jesus Christ, is dead!" Luther replied, "Nonsense! Our Lord isn't dead! He's risen and reigning!"

"Why, then," Katie asked, "have you been moping around the last week as if Jesus were dead? I thought surely our Lord had died, judging from the way you were acting."

Her point hit home hard. Have you had a day or a week recently when you went around in a bad mood or depressed? Friends, our Lord and King, Jesus Christ, is risen! And he is ruling over all things! And he loved you more than you can imagine. And he's promised you will rise and live with him in eternity. Let's snap out of it! What could possibly be going wrong in our lives that could overpower this overwhelmingly good news? Like Luther, we all need that reminder sometimes, don't we?

No, the economy isn't looking great. Some of us suffer from health problems... maybe even life-long problems. Some of us have recently lost loved ones. Some of us have loved ones who are very sick. But none of these things can dampen our hope for the future and the joy we have in Christ our King. "He lives! He lives! Who once was dead. He lives my ever living head." And that means we are forgiven. And that means we will rise and live eternally as well.

Let our song of celebration and joy begin on this Christ the King Sunday; and let it never stop until our Lord returns and we sing it with greater delight before his throne. Amen.

Yes, dear friends, if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. We'd all be living a lie. But that's not the case. We have hope for eternity. And our hope is founded in the fact that Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, has risen from the dead. Because he's risen, we know death holds no real power over us. Our risen Lord has paid the debt of sin! Because he's risen, we are guaranteed that we will also rise one day. And when we speak of death as "falling asleep," or "going to be with the angels," these aren't just flowery terms to mask death's horror, but they are true confessions which comfort and remind us of the living hope we have in a living Savior. As we continue to celebrate our Savior's resurrection, may the knowledge and joy of the resurrection fill your hearts and minds, that you may carry that joy and that living hope with you, not just on this Easter Sunday, but year round. So that a day doesn't go by where we don't think of the living hope for eternity that is ours through faith in Jesus, our risen Savior. AMEN.

What are some of your hopes for the future? I bet we would have almost as many answers as we have people in this church. "I hope to save money so I can retire when I want." "I hope my children will grow up in the Lord and live a life in service to him." "I hope to one day travel overseas and see Europe." "I hope to get all A's on my report card." "I hope to find a (better) job." We all have hopes for the future, don't we? There are two problems with most of our earthly hopes for the future: 1) What we are hoping for more often than not won't bring nearly as much happiness to our lives as we think it will. Nearly everyone hopes to win the lottery or strike it rich. Those who do find their lives aren't nearly as happy as they thought they would be. Some spend their whole working careers looking forward to retirement, only to find out that being retired didn't bring nearly the joy and satisfaction they thought it would. 2) The second problem with our earthly hopes, is that achieving those hopes is uncertain. The current economy has smashed countless people's hopes as over \$6 trillion dollars in equity has been wiped out since the crisis began. Even reaching retirement age is not a given. Jenny had an uncle who worked as a truck driver most his life. He looked forward to retirement when he could stay of the road and spend more time with his family. He got cancer and died one month before he was to retire. Earthly hopes are so uncertain, aren't they? I'm not saying you shouldn't have goals and hopes... certainly you should! But achieving them is never certain.

Kind of a depressing start to a sermon, isn't it? I say these things only to contrast earthly hopes and goals with our final, ultimate hope and goal... spending eternity in heaven. Finally, whatever happens to us in our lives on this earth, be it great success or catastrophic failure... joy or sorrow... whatever it is, it's very short lived. God gives us 70 years, and by his grace, sometimes a little more. But then our successes are finished. We can't take it with us. And by a similar token, our failures are finished. They don't follow us into the grave either. If you died rich, or penniless, it might affect the kind of coffin you're buried in, but it has no eternal bearing.

In view of all of this, it is infinitely (literally!) more important that we have hope for eternity. It is my prayer that you receive this sure and living hope today from our sermon text recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:19-24. We read:

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