

Of First Importance
1 Corinthians 15:1 – 11
February 2, 2010

Our scripture reading this morning comes from the 15th Chapter of Paul's first letter the Corinthians, verses 1 – 15. Please listen now for the reading of God's Word for the people of God.

¹Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ²By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

⁹For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray:

God of Heaven and earth, we come before You today and ask that You would bless our time with You. We praise You for giving us the opportunity to be a part of Your work and for giving us the means to better serve You. We ask You now, Our God, that You would remove any barrier that stands between us and You, tune our senses to what You want to speak to us about today and prepare our hearts and spirits to be changed and challenged according to Your Divine will and way for our lives. In Christ wonderful and Holy Name we pray. Amen.

“Now, brothers [and sisters] I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.” (1 Cor. 15:1 – 2)

Notice this morning I opened our original reading of Chapter 15 with the words, “Now, brothers, I want to remind you. . .” while immediately following our opening prayer I read the words, “Now, brothers [and sisters] I want to remind you . . .” I add the words *and sisters* to the opening lines of our reading this morning not as a sign of sacrilege or disrespect to the writings of Paul, but rather to remind each of us that the word given to us today is inclusive; given for each of us; it encompasses all who are gathered here today. Paul writes to the Corinthians that they are to be reminded of the gospel that has been brought to them and likewise in doing so they are to find renewed faith and awareness in the words of the gospel that has saved them. Accompanying this reminder, Paul also writes about the responsibility of the Corinthians to hold on firmly to the word that has been brought them and so, like Paul, I want to encourage each of you this morning to hold on firmly to the word that has been brought to you; the word that has delivered many of us here today from the binding shackles of the enemy and has freed us from the condemning shame offered (time and time again) to each of us by not only the outside world, but also from within our own homes and sometimes our own faith communities. We must hold on firmly today to the Word of God, as Paul has instructed, or else everything we have come to believe in has been believed in vain, that is, we have placed our trust in what we have been taught to be true, rather than in the truth itself. That is, the truth offered to each of us by the Good News of Jesus’ Christ; the truth that has been offered by Christ’s radically inclusive message of love, hope, forgiveness, relationship and grace.

Paul's opening words this morning bleed effortlessly into a recount of exactly what the gospel message is that we should be holding onto firmly. For all intents and purposes, we see here in these few lines "the most complete, concise expression of [what we have come to refer to as] the Good News." (Karl Jacobson, Augsburg College) The term Good News is often referred to by Christian authors, scholars and even novice readers of the bible. But exactly what is the Good News? Here in verses 3 through 5 we find the answer to that question. "And this is it:

I. Christ dies for our sins (v. 3)

II. Christ was buried (v. 4)

III. Christ was raised on the third day (v. 4) and

IV. Christ following the resurrection, Christ appeared to the disciples and many others. (v. 5)

Recall that we as a community of faith affirm our beliefs and understandings of Christianity through the recitation of the two great creeds of the ancient church; that is the *Apostle's Creed* and the *Nicene Creed*. With the exception of the addition of the appearance to the disciples, our reading today in essence offers us a gospel shorthand that highlights the same basic highpoints of the creeds of Christian tradition. "I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and Earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. Who was conceived by the Holy [Spirit], born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried . . . The third day He arose again from the dead. . ."

And on the third day He arose again from the dead. Is it important for us to hold firmly to this portion of our belief in order to be Christian? Is our understanding and faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ essential to our profession of belief in Jesus Christ? Here is a harder question. Was it necessary for Jesus to have died on the Cross? The answer to all three of these questions I believe is simply *yes*. Yes, it important for us to hold firmly to this portion of our

belief in order to be Christian. Yes, our understanding and faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is essential to our complete profession of the belief in Jesus Christ. Yes, it became necessary for Jesus to have died on the Cross. Without life, there is no death and without death there is no resurrection and without resurrection there is no *Good News*. Without *Good News* there is no hope, no calling and no relationship. All that we do would then be in vain.

Paul declares in the opening lines of his letter to the Romans that it is through the resurrection of Christ that he has been called to be an apostle, “. . . who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead . . .” (Romans 1:4). Timothy writes in his epistle, “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David – that is my gospel” (Timothy 2:8) and Paul again writes in 1 Corinthians 11, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” (v. 26) It is not only important that we recognize the truth behind the death and resurrection of our Lord, but we learn to proclaim it with prioritizing importance.

Paul teaches us this as he characterizes the gospel message of Christ to be “of first importance.” In doing so, Paul prioritizes the message of Christ to be something that was first offered to him and by the power of God and the authority of the Holy Spirit; Paul is now passing the message along to others; including the Church of Corinth and most importantly for us, to God’s people today. In 1 Corinthians 11:23ff the gospel is presented in terms of [Holy Communion], a tradition that has come to be such an important and integral part of our worship each Sunday. The act of Holy Communion is a call to remember the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This call to remembrance is reiterated in the opening lines of our reading this morning, “Now I would remind you, brothers [and sisters] of the *Good News* that has been brought to you.” (1 Cor. 15:1) The call to remember Jesus is re-proclaimed and re-confessed by Paul in our

reading this morning and it echoes the words used by our Lord and Savior as he met in the upper room with his disciples. “This is my body that is broken for you, in as much as you do this, do this in remembrance of me.”

Let us not forget this morning, but rather let us remember that Christ died for our sins. This is of first importance and this is the Gospel, the *Good News*, according to Paul. As we continue to grow as a community of faith, there are many things that will gain our attention: new ministries, new members, new faces and even a new worship space. But beware that though all of these are good and healthy for a growing church, they can become distracting and more importantly they can become for us our “first importance.” However, as the author of Matthew writes, “if we Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously,” then God is faithful and just to give us everything that we need. (6:33)

Are you seeking the Kingdom of God this morning above all else? Are you making God your first priority? Maybe you believe that you are but something inside of you this morning is telling you to take another look; to reach deep inside yourself and answer the hard questions we have asked this morning. The hardest question this morning for many of us may be the question “Is my understanding and faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ essential to my being a Christian; essential to being saved.” I think that it is and so I encourage each of you again this morning to look deep within yourselves and ask God to bring to you one final awareness as we close the season of Epiphany this morning. Are you were you need to be this morning in relationship with your God? Are you ready this morning to meet him when he comes again? Have you made Jesus, our God, your first importance? Amen.