

Hope's Foundation  
1 Corinthians 15:1-20  
May 7, 2023  
West Valley Presbyterian Church

SLIDE 1

1. A few weeks ago, one of my fellow Master Gardener trainees asked me what the difference was between the different types of Christianity. Her parents are Ukrainian immigrants, so I figured – incorrectly, as it turned out- that she might know something about the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, as those are both prominent in Ukraine. So I started by saying that the Orthodox and the Roman Catholics had split about a thousand years ago over a change in the Apostles' Creed; and that the Protestants had split off from Catholics about 500 years ago over the issue of selling indulgences to get people out of purgatory. (Which, BTW, Catholics don't do any more.)

2. And honestly, I felt kind of silly explaining those theological differences to someone who, as it turns out, knew nothing about Christianity at all. Do either of those issues sound all that important to you? (No.) People were willing to kill and die over those differences 500 or 1000 years ago. Now, they sound kind of trivial. What Christians hold in common is a lot more important than our differences. I'd have done better to ask my Master Gardener friend what she knew about Christianity, before launching into A Condensed Version of 2000 Years of Christian History!

3. Even better yet, I should have followed Paul's example in his first letter to the Corinthians. This was a church of mostly former pagans, in the prominent trading city of Corinth, which was known for its diversity, culture, commerce and wealth- not unlike Silicon Valley today. Paul's concern was to emphasize the beliefs that the church members held in common, so they would quit quarreling about where they differed. When I was talking to my colleague, I should have done what Paul did. I should have emphasized what all Christians believe- because that's much more important than our differences. This is what Paul considered to be the foundation of all Christian belief. 1 Cor 15:1-20.

SLIDES 2-9

**15** 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. <sup>2</sup>By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

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

<sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup>But 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. <sup>11</sup>Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

<sup>12</sup>But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup>If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. <sup>14</sup>And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. <sup>15</sup>More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup>For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. <sup>17</sup>And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup>Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. <sup>19</sup>If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

<sup>20</sup>But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Here ends the reading of God's word. Thanks be to God.

#### SLIDE 10

4. That's it. That's the foundation of all Christian belief, at all times and in all places. Doesn't matter what era, or what church, or what denomination. All Christians believe that Jesus died for our sins, in accordance with the Scriptures (specifically, Isaiah 53). We believe that he was buried – that he was really, truly dead. We believe that he was raised on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day in accordance with the Scriptures (specifically, Psalm 16, also cited by Peter in his sermon at Pentecost). We believe that he really was resurrected, that he was then and is now alive, and that there were many witnesses who saw and heard and touched the risen Jesus. That's what all the apostles, including Paul, taught. That's what's been handed down to us 2000 years later. Everything else that we believe as Christians is based upon that foundation.

5. And. That's really important to us personally. As we grow older, death becomes more familiar, right? We lose family members. We lose friends. Most of us will lose a spouse, in the future if we haven't already. And eventually, death will come for us as well – unless Jesus returns first. So we do wonder. What happens to us when we die? Do we just cease to exist, like if you turned off the light switch? Or do we become spiritual beings that are absorbed into God somehow, like how drops of rain are absorbed into the ocean? Or does our body regrow somehow? Paul does his best to address the specifics, which we will look at next week; but the critical point for this week is, that Jesus was raised from the dead, and so will we be.

6. As Paul says, there has to be resurrection – because Jesus was raised. We know that, he says, because we saw him. And besides, if he wasn't raised, says Paul, then we are risking our lives for a delusion. And why would anyone do that? "If only for this life we have hope in Christ," says Paul, "we are of all people most to be pitied." That's true. Paul is quite right. If we only have hope in Christ for this life, then we've all just been kidding ourselves – knocking ourselves out for nothing. Jesus would have been just a preacher with good ethical teaching, the same as lots of others. He

wouldn't have died for our sins; he would have just died like anybody else. And then we would have remained just as much mired in sin as anybody else. We would have given our lives to God for nothing. We would have worked hard to build this church and maintain it for nothing.

#### SLIDE 11

7. But. In fact Jesus was raised from the dead. That is established, as well as any miracle can be. Therefore there IS such a thing as resurrection. Therefore we have hope. We have hope for our lives right now, and we have hope for our lives in the future. And that hope is not based on our own life experiences, which are quite limited. Our hope is based on something much bigger than ourselves. Our hope is based on something that is not a myth. That is not wishful thinking. Our hope is based on a fact. Yes, it's a fact much bigger than our understanding; but it is a fact nonetheless. Our hope is based on Jesus' resurrection. We love and serve a living Jesus, whom we know today, right here and now, by the work of the Holy Spirit through Scripture. For two thousand years, we Christians in every time and in every place have placed our hope and trust in a risen Jesus who is alive. And so do we. Right here in West Valley, in May of 2023, AD, Anno Domini, in the Year of Our Lord.

#### SLIDE 12

8. Okay. So what does that mean for us personally? It means that we have courage. Hope gives us courage, whatever the future may hold for us as individuals. Hope makes it possible for us to step into the unknown, knowing that Jesus is holding our hands at every step. We can't see the future. But he can. He does. He is able to understand the infinite array of possibilities and consequences that are out there- which we, as limited creatures, are not able to comprehend.

9. In fact, if we had a choice – between seeing a tiny portion of the future with our very limited capacity, and no understanding of consequences– or, to walk hand in hand with the one who can truly see the infinite fullness of the future and does know what all the consequences are, and can truly guide us along the right path – well, which would you choose? It would be so much better for us to walk into the future with Jesus, rather than try to pick our own way through the future all by ourselves, without knowing what the consequences would be. If you have decisions to make about your future, then the very best thing you can do is to pray, and turn the decision over to Jesus. His spirit can help you sort out the options; his spirit can help you choose; and his spirit can give you the courage to step forward.

#### SLIDE 13

10. And what does that mean for us as a church? Same thing. Our hope in Jesus gives us courage, whatever our future may hold for us. Two weeks ago you heard from Nate Dreesman and Luke Parker, from our denomination, about the possibilities for a church plant while also remaining – and, if God wills it, thriving - as a legacy church. Legacy church, what does that mean? It's like being a grandparent that helps the parents raise the children. If grandparents do a good job, they are blessings to the parents as well as to the children, and they help to ensure that the children grow up in the Lord. A good grandparent will love the children, but won't be the primary ones in charge of

their raising- unless the parents for some reason are unable to do so. A good grandparent will help if the parents ask; and a good grandparent will also back off if the parents ask.

11. Two years ago, or even one year ago, we were all still dealing with Covid. Church met online, meetings were online, and we seldom connected with one another in person. But circumstances have changed since then. We are glad to be with one another and worship in person together, and eat donuts together, and dance together, or watch videos together, or study the Bible together. So it makes sense for us now to look to the future together with the courage that our hope in Jesus brings to us.

#### SLIDE 14

12. Jesus' resurrection is a fact. And that fact is the foundation of our hope in Jesus, which we share with all Christians in every time and every place. And our hope in Jesus gives us courage we need for our future, as individuals and as a church. Let's reinforce that hope by saying together the Nicene Creed, which all branches of the Christian church affirm as a statement of our faith. Please join me in saying the Nicene Creed.

#### SLIDES 15-19

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,

was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;

he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Source: PCUSA Book of Confessions (1999)