

From The Pastor

Christ the Firstfruits

Sometimes Christians are influenced by ideas that they pick up from the world without even realizing where they come from. Sometimes Lutherans are influenced by ideas that come from outside of the Lutheran faith. Often these ideas are hostile to faith and the Word of God. They prevent growth in the wisdom and knowledge of God, and can eventually lead a person away from faith altogether if such foreign ideas are not corrected by God's Word. Christians should, therefore, be "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:5). Christ's Word brings freedom. Jesus said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn 8:31-32).

St. Paul asked the Corinthians, "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (1Cor 15:12) Think of it. Some members of that troubled congregation were actually saying that there is no resurrection of the dead! They must have picked up this idea either from their pagan culture or from some false teacher posing as a Christian preacher, but they certainly didn't get it from the holy Word of God. And notice that those who held this error considered themselves members in good standing in the Corinthian congregation; they didn't see that such an idea is destructive of faith. In 1 Cor 15, Paul patiently but firmly corrects this grievous error so that the erring might cast it away and be established once again in the truth that frees.

In vss. 1-11 St. Paul presents a

summary of the saving apostolic gospel which he had taught the Corinthians. He had delivered to them what he had received (from Christ, Gal 1:11-12). True faith stands on the Word of God alone. The summary of the apostolic gospel looks like this:

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures

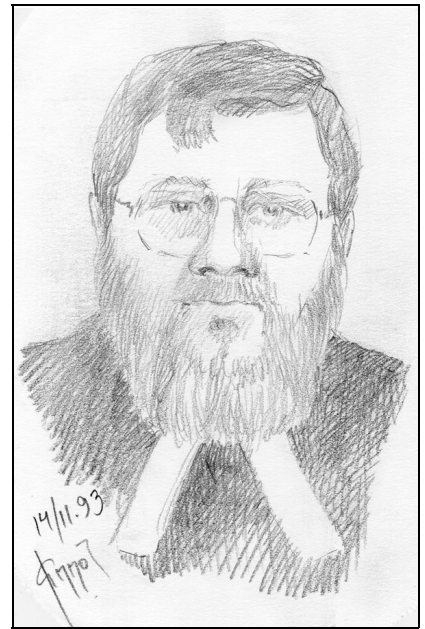
He was buried

He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures

He was seen (after His resurrection)

Then Paul gives a list of those who saw the risen Christ: Cephas (Peter), the Twelve; 500+ brethren at once, James, all the apostles, Paul himself. So, the death and resurrection of Christ are attested by Scripture, and by eyewitness apostolic testimony. "So we preach, and so ye believed." How then can some in the congregation hold a doctrine so contrary to this?

In vss. 12-19 St. Paul shows how inimical to the Christian faith is the idea that there is no resurrection of the dead. "But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." In short, No resurrection? Then Christ is not risen. Christ not risen? Then the Christian faith is vain. Christian faith



vain? Then you are still in your sins, and your loved ones have perished. If our hope in Christ is only for this life, then we are more miserable than all other people.

In vss. 20-34 St. Paul highlights the wonderful blessing that is our because Christ *is* risen. In Christ's resurrection we are guaranteed deliverance from temporal and eternal death. In Adam all die, but in Christ all shall be made alive. Christ was the first to rise; those who are Christ's shall follow in the resurrection at the last day. Death shall be destroyed and the Kingdom of Glory shall be ours forever. Therefore, our Christian faith is sound, and the tribulations we endure are meaningless suffering. "The truth shall make you free."

Paul concludes this section with a warning and an exhortation. "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame" (vss. 33-34). Be careful who you listen to and what ideas you pick up. Make every thought captive to the Word of God. Forsake error and awake to righteousness. Christ is risen and lives and reigns to all eternity. Believers shall rise to eternal life. The Christian faith is the truth. Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory which shall be revealed in us. He is risen. Alleluia!

- Pastor Terjesen