



1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-5 | Focus on Christ's Cross

Sunday, April 5, 2015 — The Festival of the Resurrection of our Lord

¹ Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

When Christ was nothing but a suspended carcass, dripping with his own blood and other people's spit, there were no worshippers around clapping their hands and singing their hymns. They were long gone. At the very end, ironically at the moment of greatest triumph, he had no followers left. That's the core of the Christian message—death first, then resurrection. It's easy to get wrapped up in the glory of this day. Power has won. Christ is victorious. We see the enemy defeated. It puts a pep in our step and we find strength in Christ's feat over death. But don't focus on the power. Take your gaze off the empty tomb. For here, as elsewhere in the Christian story, success and failure are inverted. The first will be last and the last first. The rich are cast down and the poor are exalted. The true king is crowned with mockery and thorns not with gold and ermine.

It is here that Paul points you. "I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you...By this gospel you are saved." Sure, the tomb sits empty. Yes, "what joy this sweet sentence gives: I know that my Redeemer lives." But it is not the tomb that saves. It is Christ, in death. It is the cross.

It seems counterintuitive, doesn't it? The cross is a symbol of defeat. Christ's agony on the cross is something we avoid. There's a reason that this church wasn't this full on Friday. The Christian faith, properly understood, is a religion of losers—the worst of playground insults. For not only do we not want to be a loser, we don't want to associate with them either. We pointedly shun losers, as if some of their loser-ness might rub off on us. Or rather, more honestly, we shun them because others might recognize us as among their number. And because we secretly fear that this might actually be true, we shun them all the more viciously, thus to distance ourselves all the more emphatically. And so the cock crows three times.

But it is true. Deep failure, the failure of our lives when measured against God's glory, is something we occasionally contemplate in the middle of the night, in those moments of terrifying honesty before we get up and dress for success. *Ecce homo*, said Pilate. *Behold, the man*. This is humanity. This is you. This is me. And the façade of success we present to the world is commonly

a desperate attempt to ward off this knowledge. At the beginning of Lent, we were reminded of this in the most emphatic of ways: *know that you are dust and to dust you shall return*. And sitting here just two days ago we see what that failure did. We failed to keep an innocent man from dying. We failed to stop a vicious mob from attacking our Lord. At the end of Lent we are reminded, in the most terrifying of ways, that our failure leads to death—our death.

But here's the thing. Your God strips you down to nothing in order for you to face yourself anew. For it turns out that losers are not despised or rejected, not ultimately. In fact, losers can discover something about themselves that winners cannot ever appreciate—that they are loved and wanted simply because of who they are and not because of what they achieve. This is revealed precisely at the greatest point of dejection. The resurrection is not a conjuring trick with bones. When all seemed to be lost; when all confidence seemed to be squashed; when a good life seems to come at the greatest cost—then, and only then, do we find hope in the cross.

So, dear Christians, focus today on Christ's cross. Do not get caught up in the glory of the tomb. Sure, the tomb guarantees our victory over death. Sure, the open grave promises hope after this life. But the empty tomb came at a great price. Death. You see, without the death of Christ, there would be no tomb. Without the death of Christ, there would be no hope. Without the death of Christ, there would be no promise of life. So focus on the Cross. Come to him with humble and joyful hearts. Thank God rightfully for the victory that has been won for you—through the cross of Christ. Amen.



Soli Deo Gloria!

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