



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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February 11, 2007

6th Sunday after Epiphany

1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Jeremiah 17:5-8

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 1

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20

Gospel: Luke 6:17-26

Resurrection Assumptions

Assumptions can get us into trouble at times, right? We can make an assumption and if that assumption is incorrect, it can lead to all kinds of problems. I remember talking with my Dad once about some work he had to go do overseas. I don't remember if it was South America or Europe, but he had to go to a plant because they were having all kinds of problems running some process he had helped develop. When he got over there, he found out it was kind of a simple fix. When they had translated the directions, there was a word that meant "without water" in how you ran this process, but the person who did the translating assumed that it meant "with water." They assumed they knew what that word was because they saw the root word for water in there and just plowed on ahead and it caused all kinds of problems. They lost all kinds of money and used up all kinds of time and energy and resources because of one little false assumption about one little, itty bitty word. But that is some place overseas; we would never make false assumptions, would we?

I heard recently via the grapevine in our congregation that this summer when all the computers were in the hallway—we replaced all the computers in our lab in the basement—that someone was concerned that with the operating debt that we have, how could we be spending all that money on all those new computers? I don't know who said it or what they did, but I sure hope they followed up and went to someone that would know, like Mrs. Humann, and found out what exactly what was going on. The computers were donated. They didn't cost us a cent. They came from a company that was replacing their computers and they gave them to us. All it cost us was the time and energy to set them up.

Now, can you see if there is a false assumption made about where they came from and what was done and over a cup of coffee somewhere someone starts talking and says, "Can you believe they spent all that money on those new computers"—the problems that could come all because of a false assumption that could have been easily corrected.

False assumptions are what lead to this section of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. He had addressed a number of problems in Corinth that we have been looking at—the lack of love as they used their spiritual gifts, among other things—but in this section, they had a false assumption about what happens when you die. The false assumption they had was that there is no resurrection of the dead.

When we know someone who dies, there are basically two resurrection assumptions you can have, right? If there is no resurrection, that equals an end without hope, but if we know there is a resurrection of the body, Paul reminds us that means that we have endless hope and what a difference that makes for us as we face this life.

When was that show, the A Team—do any of you guys remember that? Mr. T, way back when, I don't remember—what was the phrase Mr. T always said? Does anyone remember? What did Mr. T always say? "I pity the fool," right? He's not real original with it, is he? Isn't that exactly what Paul says in our text that I read to you? "I pity the fool that thinks Jesus is only for this lifetime." I don't know if Mr. T read 1 Corinthians 15, but if he did, he certainly would have gotten that answer, wouldn't he? *If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men* (1 Corinthians 15:19). That is how he put it. "I pity the fool."

Think about it—even today there are fools like that who should be pitied because they view Jesus as only a great teacher, a revolutionary, a great example—what would Jesus do, as though that is the only reason he came so that we would look at what he did and so that we would do the same. Or they think he was a revolutionary that loved the outcasts. He loved those on the fringes of society and now that is what we should do. Sure we should do that, but if that is the only reason that Christ is important to us, then we are to be pitied more than all men. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we have no hope.

Unfortunately, that is what was going on in Corinth. Do you remember in Corinth we had talked about earlier how there were about eight temples to various pagan gods and the people that grew up as pagans in the Corinthian congregation were very used to Greek philosophy and Greek thought, and one of the prevailing thoughts and one of the prevailing teachings at that time and in that place was that there is no resurrection from the dead. It was influenced by Plato. Another thought was that there is nothing after this world, so it led to things like schools of philosophy of stoicism, Stoics—you just endure everything because there is no point in anything anyhow. It also led to the other end of the spectrum, the Epicureans—eat, drink and be merry because tomorrow we die, and when we die, there is nothing.

All their lives this is what they were used to thinking. All their lives they had been taught no resurrection from the dead. So now when they hear the Christian message that Jesus rose from the dead, which assures us that his life in our place and his death is the punishment for our sins—that it is acceptable to God and that our sins are forgiven—evidently some of them could say, "Yes, Jesus rose from the dead, but he is true God and he goes and lives back in heaven with God, but that is not what happens to us"—this is what some had been teaching.

So when the report comes to Paul that some of them were saying there is no resurrection of the dead, Paul has to write to them in this section of the letter and say, "Think about the assumption. If you have that assumption that there is no resurrection of the dead, think of what this means. Because not only was Jesus true God, he was also true man. And if the dead don't rise, then Christ didn't rise. And if Christ didn't rise

from the dead, his life in our place, his death as the punishment for our sins was useless and it was meaningless. *Your faith is futile; you are still in your sins* (1 Corinthians 15:17)—you are not forgiven, you are not right with God, you cannot approach God as a loving child to a loving heavenly Father if Christ didn't rise from the dead. All of Christianity is useless and meaningless. When you look ahead to the end of your life, you have no hope." If that is the case, in essence what Paul is telling them is to get rid of everything. There is no hope for us today. Get rid of all of our churches and turn them into museums or concert halls or something else. Put a big swimming pool in the middle of them, I don't know, do something else with them because they are useless if Christ didn't rise from the dead. That one false assumption would lead to the loss of all the gifts God has for us of forgiveness, life and salvation.

So Paul spends this whole chapter, Chapter 15, talking about the importance of the resurrection from the dead. That is why Easter is such an important day in the church year—the highest day in the church year. Did you ever notice how often we end prayers with “who lives and reigns with God the Father?” Because the resurrection is so important to us, even in our prayer life we remind ourselves that Christ has indeed been raised from the dead because with the resurrection, with that correct assumption comes this knowledge that you and I now have endless hope and nothing can undermine the hope that we have in Christ because Christ is the firstfruits of those who have been asleep.

Firstfruits—first implies like if I say to you, “Here is my first point,” what do you know is coming—those of you that are still awake?—a second point, right? The firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep means second, third, fourth, and so on, and so on, and so on. All those who die in Christ will be raised with glorified bodies and will be spending life bodily with God in heaven. Jesus himself said that, didn't he? Because I live, you will live also—didn't Jesus himself say, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die”* (John 11:25, 26).

Jesus taught the resurrection of the body. Jesus taught that he would rise. Jesus said that means we also will rise. Jesus lay that as one of the chief cornerstones of his powerful teaching where he revealed himself as the Lord who gives this incredible blessing—forgiveness, life, salvation. It comes to us because God gave us his best. He didn't say, “You know, those people are all sinners. Gabriel, why don't you try to redeem them? Michael (the Arch Angel) you go and try to redeem them.” He didn't send someone who couldn't save us. He didn't do something second rate. He gave us his best. He gave us himself.

Now that we know that, we have endless hope. We have this confidence that our sins are forgiven—not because we are good, not because we try hard, not because we are better than someone else, but because Jesus took away all of our sins and the resurrection assures us of that. Now because of that, we want to give God our best. We don't approach God and say, “God, you know those people that only come once or twice a year? You are lucky you have me here. I am here more often”—as though God owes us something. We want to give him our best because he gave us his best. We want to give him our best as we live for him, as we serve him, as we share this truth

with all those people out there who are still living with a hopeless end. They are living not knowing that Christ took away their sins. They might think they have an afterlife, but they might think it is because of who they are or what they do or whatever the case may be. You and I have the answers. They are in the palm of our hands. It is Jesus Christ, his body and blood, given and shed for our sins. It is his perfection. It is his gift. It is his doing. He tells us to “go and tell people about it, and I will be with you always as you tell them about it. I will bless you so that you can live in this endless hope.”

Assumptions—we all make them. But as Christians, let’s make the ones the Holy Spirit, who lives in us, has given us.