

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Below are the readings and sermon from Sunday May 24, 2020. May the Word of God and my meditations prove fruitful to your faith today.

Your brother in Christ,

Pastor Steve

### **GOSPEL READING MARK 12:26-27A**

P: The Holy Gospel according to Saint Mark the 12th Chapter.

C: Glory to you, O Lord.

*The Gospel is read.*

P: <sup>26</sup>And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? <sup>27</sup>He is God not of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong."

P: The Gospel of our Lord.

**C: Praise to you, O Christ.**

### **READING 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-26, 51-57**

<sup>1</sup>Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, <sup>2</sup>through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you — unless you have come to

believe in vain. <sup>3</sup>For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>4</sup>and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup>Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. <sup>7</sup>Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup>Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. <sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles, unfit 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 toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them — though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. <sup>11</sup>Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe. <sup>12</sup>Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup>If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; <sup>14</sup>and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. <sup>15</sup>We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ — whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup>For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. <sup>17</sup>If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup>Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup>If for this life only we have hoped in

Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. <sup>20</sup>But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. <sup>21</sup>For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; <sup>22</sup>for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. <sup>23</sup>But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup>Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup>For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup>The last enemy to be destroyed is death. <sup>51</sup>Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, <sup>52</sup>in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. <sup>53</sup>For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup>When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." <sup>55</sup>"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" <sup>56</sup>The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup>But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Word of God, word of Life.

C: Thanks be to God.

## SERMON

Speaking directly to the subject death, Paul taunts it with the words of Hosea 13:14... *Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?* These are the concluding words of this creedal like passage of 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. Chap. 15. Triumphant words of life over death as grounded in Paul's theology of the cross. There was a life. There was a death. There is a resurrection. There is a resurrection. Paul is pushing back against the Corinthian congregation that seems to be hung up on whether or not the resurrection of Jesus occurred. Paul goes on to provide names, and the numbers of people who were eyewitnesses to the fact that Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed!* But it would appear that this kind of enthusiasm for a God who is not dead, but alive, is proving evasive to the Corinthians faith. The death, they get, but the resurrection, not so much.

Paul's appeal to them to understand the resurrection as the truthful act of loving and wholly present God begins at the cross, and does not end at Jesus resurrection from the dead, but continues through their faith-driven understanding that it is the hope for life today and in eternity. As Christ was raised from the dead, so have you. As Christ defeated death on the cross, for your forgiveness of sins, past, present and future so too are you called to live in the promise of the resurrection. Christ's death was the death of your, in so much as you believe the benefits of the cross lead one to living a resurrection life.

The cross informs the faithful understanding of the resurrection, and the empty tomb is, well, empty, if the enormity of what was accomplished on the cross is not acknowledged. One cannot be without the other.

So Paul goes into this long theological dissertation because he knows the congregation is struggling. Paul has spent the previous fourteen chapters lovingly chastising them for their behavior and now he goes after them for their theology. They get the cross. A sacrifice for sins. That transaction they understand. God is pleased because something of great worth has been given over to death. They have heard the stories. The accounts of Jesus, healing, feeding, empathizing and advocating on behalf of the marginalized. That part is an easy sell. But now their faith is challenged by one another, by the world around them, and it looks for more now. Their understanding has stopped short of being hopeful. Jesus isn't to be sacrificed again. No. In fact, the rest of the story is that God brought him out of the depths of hell so that those who believe in this feat, may have eternal life. But they can't see life, good promise-filled, full of light and hope life, let alone eternal life, when they are mired by internal conflict, oppressed by authorities, and so on.

The very reasons for them finding their way to this radically different faith is that it stuck its nose up to the very things that promoted the daily death of their dignity, self-worth, and value to society.

The very stumbling blocks that time and time again prevented them, defined them, and pitted themselves against others has found a way to infect, and hinder their hope. They have been stung by life. And now they need a reminder of how death lost its sting.

They need the stories of Jesus. They need the witness of each other. They need to see each other as equally forgiven people. They need to forgive one another as they have been forgiven and live in the hope of the resurrection, towards an eternal life. They needed a good reminding of the good news that was proclaimed to them, that they received, and in which they stand, and through which they are **being** saved. The operative words...**being saved**. Being saved is a process of living now, not later. Living is forgiving and forging onward past the past, and into the life Christ died for us to have, and through which the Spirit empowers us.

We have all been stung by life in one way or another. We have all experienced moments or seasons in our life in which we find ourselves scrambling for hope. You, your family, your circle of friends, your workplace, or your community, needs a win. And for whatever reason it just does not come to be. The assurance of what is good and prosperous and hoped for, and the conviction that though unseen, is oh slow close to a being a reality, repeatedly falls short of expectations. Hopes dashed. In a funk.

The other day I went to CVS to get a prescription. As I walked into CVS I grudgingly put my mask on. In the midst of me checking out, I let out a more audible than I thought sigh. The pharmacy tech said, “Long day? Tired?” I responded, “Oh, no. Not tired.” Accompanied by an upward swirling like motion that seems to translate well these days, I replied, “Just this I suppose.” Without missing a beat she said, “Each day is a step.”

My response to her was much less inspirational and encouraging as I replied, “Yes it is. I will try to remember that.” And I did remember it. *Each day is a step* kept coming back to me. Outside the state of the world we live in now, her comment to me likely would not have hung in my conscience as it did. *Each day is a step*.

Which direction are you stepping Steve? Are you stepping towards resurrection life Steve? Are you walking, talking, breathing and projecting a resurrection life Steve? That is to say are you living under that cloud of witnesses of faith or are you permitting life’s dark clouds to overshadow you? I believe it was a moment in my day, not the overall mood of my day that I presented in that minute and a half at the CVS checkout. Either way, the pharmacy tech held read me, and then reminded me that this (motioning upward) is just a step in the journey.

This is where Paul reminds the Corinthians that their faith in Jesus Christ is a constant process. The resurrection is as much an event in time as it is a way of living in the meantime.

Paul is reminding them that they are resurrection people, and that it would do them well to live as such with and for each other. Paul is encouraging them to consider the cloud of witnesses that carried the faith long before them. Be reminded of what life they endured and persevered through in order for their witness to be rooted in them. Speak the faith so as to live in the faith. Live the faith and you can't help but not speak of your faith!

In his book, *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*, Bishop Desmond Tutu writes, "We are fragile creatures, and it is from this weakness, not despite it, that we discover the possibility of true joy." Amen. Well said brother Desmond. Joy is discovered in the repairing of our emotional and physical pains. Joy is made possible and discovered when the weakness of one is ministered to by another. Joy is discovered when our broken pieces form a whole. Joy is discovered and hope abounds when us fragile creatures lovingly surrender ourselves to the needs of one another. Joy is discovered when we are reminded by one another of what we have. We have Jesus Christ, the source of all life, all healing and all forgiveness.

May He be the source of your encouraging words, mended divisions, random acts of kindness, healing bodies and healing hearts. May the stings of life be swallowed up in the victory of Jesus Christ and have you step towards, and with Him daily. And may the constant needs of our resurrection faith be bolstered by those who's faithful steps we walk in and lead others in...in this day. Amen.