

The Resurrection of Our Lord — Easter Day
April 16, 2017
Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

1 Corinthians 15:19-26 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Focus on Christ this Easter: Your Hope

Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed!

It all depends. What do you plan to do this Easter? Well, if I stay here, it will be pretty relaxed. But if I go visit family, then there will be the dust devil of travel, the hurrying and waiting, the joy of spending time with relatives, and the bustle of getting back for work again. Ask a graduating senior what she's doing. It depends on whether she can get the oh-so-important scholarship to get into her first choice of school. If the school with the maximum financial aid has the program she wants. If she still gets the chance to compete in sports. If she's graduating college and can get a great job right away or has to go back to graduate school to take a few more years and spend a few more tens of thousands of dollars to get more initials after her name.

That's just the way our lives work. Few things are absolutely, 100% certain. If the economy picks up, then you will see more money in your pocket and some of those bills will start to disappear. If you can avoid discussing politics, then you have a harmonious and peace-filled Easter Sunday dinner. And that's how we have to plan our lives. You have to be ready with contingencies, prepare a plan B for every first choice. Otherwise, if you get zeroed in on only one possible outcome you'll get caught off guard and let your entire life get ruined.

Hope is like that. Your hope for life depends on certain things to happen. Your hope beyond this life requires one important event to be true. The resurrection. It all depends on whether or not Jesus died and stayed dead or whether he rose from the grave. Really and actually, physically and bodily came back from death to live again. If not, then hope is just a vapor floating away into the wind. In 1 Corinthians chapter fifteen, the Apostle Paul is honest, blunt actually. He gets past the small talk of spirituality and gets down to the cold, hard truth. If there is no such thing as a resurrection, then all of this - faith, religion, being led by any moral or ethical system - it's all a complete waste of time. He boils it down for us: **"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied."** (1 Corinthians 15:19) It all depends. Our hope depends on Christ.

I'd like you to meet Jonathan Koch. He is a Hollywood executive. A very successful Hollywood executive who has been behind many reality TV hits. In the showbiz industry Jonathan is known for the bulldog tenacity to close a deal, to make a project become reality. But he's also known for something else. In a community known for extravagance and excess, the only excesses Jonathan is known for is his extreme dedication to health and fitness. Up before dawn each day, he led friends in group exercise routines. His idea of a crazy night was indulging in a bowl of Honey Nut Cheerios while watching TV before heading to bed at 9pm. He didn't drink. Didn't smoke. Never did any drugs.¹

That's why it was so strange that Jonathan Kock found himself fighting for life during one of the most important events in his industry. In January 2015 he was on his way to the Realscreen Summit, dubbed the Reality Prom by industry insiders, in Washington, D.C. When he woke up the morning his flight was supposed to leave, he wasn't feeling well, so he took a later flight. When the conference kicked off the following day, he was feeling even worse. Looking an an employee of his production company and seeing three of her, he decided to check himself into George Washington University Hospital. There doctors ran all kinds of tests, tried all kinds of treatments. None of it worked. Instead, he only got worse, his pain becoming unbearable. Around 2am, less than 24 hours after arriving at the hospital, doctors had some sobering news. "Text everyone you love," they said, "you're probably going to die tonight."

Doctors made the decision to put Jonathan into a medically-induced coma. It would have long term health consequences, but might save his life. Which, at this point raised his odds to 10% survival. They were unable to pinpoint one exact cause, so they started bombarding him with remedies for just about anything that hadn't been ruled out. And that is the real issue. How had a highly-successful, exercise fanatic with the vitals of a professional athlete be this close to death's doorway? And what about normal people? What about people who don't have the resources of someone who runs a production company worth \$100 million? What about people who are pleased with squeezing in a 20 minute walk every few days? If the best among us can't guarantee himself a long and successful and happy life by his never-give-up attitude, what about the rest of us?

It all depends. If you are a human being, then you will face some very real enemies. If you are alive, then there is no way to escape the reality of death. Try harder, do better, get to the top, win at life. But there is still no certainty. There is no guarantee you can get what you're after. There's still nothing more secure than wishful thinking. And absolutely no answer to death.

If we are to have any hope in life, it all depends on the resurrection of Jesus.

But is that a realistic hope? Is resurrection even possible? The people to whom the Apostle Paul addressed this letter were believers in Jesus Christ. That doesn't mean, however, that

¹ Amy Wallace. The Hollywood Exec and the Hand Transplant That Changed His Life. Los Angeles Magazine. March 20, 2017. Accessed April 10, 2017 at <http://www.lamag.com/longform/the-hollywood-exec-and-the-hand-transplant-that-changed-his-life/>

they had every aspect of the faith straight. Most likely, they were influenced by the prevailing philosophy of their day. All the wisest and most respected minds laughed at any idea of a physical resurrection. Those who chose to indulge in spiritual speculation thought the soul of a person would come free from the body at death. The soul survives and enters into some kind of alternate existence after the body goes back to the earth.

Even people with a background in the Bible, what we call the Old Testament today, had pretty low expectations. They knew of a few rare examples of people coming back to life. But generally only expected some sort of spiritual rebirth at the end of the world when God judges all people. The women going to the tomb of Jesus early Sunday morning and the disciples hiding away in fear just show they had no expectations that Jesus would come back to life again. That's why the women have to hear from the angel: **"Don't be alarmed."** (Mark 16:6) That's why Peter and John have to run to the tomb themselves. (John 20:3-8) That's why Thomas demanded a special appearance from Jesus.

It wasn't expected. It wasn't even possible in their minds. But it happened: **"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead."** (1 Corinthians 15:20) It's real. It really happened. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia.

And if Jesus is alive again, that changes everything. If Jesus rose from the dead, then there is hope: **"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."** (1 Corinthians 15:20) As children of Adam and Eve we face the realities of life. We suffer. We experience loss. We know our time on earth will come to an end. But to everyone who belongs to Jesus, you have another reality: **"For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him."** (1 Corinthians 15:21-23) What our first parents unleashed on humanity, Jesus came to undo. The sin and death that are part of every human existence is answered by the sinless Son of God. He came back from death to give you life. You have life now and life on the other side of death. Real life. Then physical resurrection. Then a resurrected body.

Jesus is your firstfruits. This picture is used in the Bible as an initial installment which anticipates a greater completion to come. In Old Testament times God's people brought in the firstfruits of their flocks and crops and gave them as offerings of gratitude for God's goodness. The rest of the plants or animals were still there. The harvest was out there. It just hadn't been brought in yet. What Jesus experienced will be your experience. When your physical life ends, you will be raised back to life just as He was.

Maybe you're wondering what happened to Jonathan Koch. Well, despite the odds, he survived that medically-induced coma. But now he faced another problem. His body had started to shut down in order to save his organs at the core of his body. That meant his extremities didn't fare so well. His feet and hands deteriorated to the point where they were dying on his body. Maintaining his sense of humor, Jonathan joked that those were his Egyptian parts because they looked, well, mummified.

He survived, but what hope did he have at a real life? How could he run his company? How would he get back to enjoying physical fitness? That all seemed lost. That is until he was introduced to a pioneer in medicine named Dr Kodi Azari. Dr Azari was working on developing new techniques that would enable him to perform a hand transplant surgery. Sounds like science fiction. But any innovative medical procedure is groundbreaking and unprecedented because it hasn't been done before, not because it is impossible. But once it has been performed, it opens up a whole new world of possibilities.

Jesus is your firstfruits in the sense of your groundbreaker in the defeat of death. All the curses attached to humanity have their solution in the resurrection of Jesus. Not "if," but "because" Christ rose from the dead. All spiritual enemies, all hostile forces at work against your soul find their demise in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is your hope: **"Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet."** (1 Corinthians 15:24,25) The power of your enemies will be broken utterly and forever so that they can't lift a finger against King Jesus. Since Jesus rose, we have hope on top of hope.

And yet we experience grief. We face real struggles in a real world today this side of death. We experience heartache, separation, and sadness. Satan still does his work. Sin still means we face death. We still live in fear. But if Jesus has risen, then he will come again. At the coming of Jesus, even the sting of death will be removed. Sin and Satan will be completely abolished. Then death disappears: **"The last enemy to be destroyed is death."** (1 Corinthians 15:26) No enemy will be left on the scene. Only Jesus will stand in victory. And you will share in that victory.

All of life stands on this one, certain hope: Jesus has defeated death. Jesus is your life. Jesus is your hope. His life is your guarantee of life after death. Focus on Christ this Easter: He is your hope. Amen.