

Calvary United Methodist Church
April 1, 2018

EASTER
Alive Forevermore
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher



Message:

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

The Word of God as recorded in Paul's letter to the Church at Corinth: Friends, let me go over the Message with you one final time, This message that I proclaimed and that is made your own; this Message on which you took your stand, by which your life has been saved. I'm assuming, now, that your belief was the real thing and not a passing fancy, that you're for good and holding fast. The first thing I did was place before you what was placed so emphatically before me: that the Messiah died for our sins, Exactly as Scripture tells it; that he was buried; that he was raised from the death on the third day, again exactly as Scripture says. That he presented himself alive to Peter, then to the closest followers and later to more than five hundred of his followers all at the same time. Most of them still around, although a few of them have since died; that he spent time with James and the rest of those commissioned to represent him; And that he finally presented himself alive to me.

Alive forevermore. It sounds like a lie, but it's not. In 1982 I was just a young man, hard to imagine. I was heading off on a mission and my grandmother had been very ill for some time. I went to see her at the hospital and I left that day for Cuba. She died that day. I didn't find out for a couple of weeks later. Every time I share God's Word my grandmother is still alive.

About the second year of my last parish I lost a friend from my previous parish and I've talked about her before. Her name was Viola. Viola had me for lunch every Wednesday for seven years. She was 85 when I met her and passed when she was about 95. She's not really passed, because every time I sing, I think of Viola because Viola and I sang every Wednesday afternoon for seven years.

Fourteen years ago my father passed. I can't tell you that I can ever lead a mission or be on a mission or hammer a nail or fix a pipe or help build a wheelchair ramp for someone in need or put a roof on someone's house that is falling down on a mission, my father is alive. You catch what I am saying? There is a lot of the world around us that

Alive
Forevermore

thinks this is it and when it's over, it's over, but it's not. Those who have passed on are like Christ: they live in us and we live for them. You and I have this gift, this possibility of living for others.



We've all been in those situations that people tell us it's a no-win. I've know many friends through the years when I was up at Penn State who would leave during the last quarter because we were getting beaten so bad it's not going to turn around. And all of a sudden they found out in the car that they missed the winning touchdown. You've heard about that when people that leave a baseball game.



We've heard about that when people get sick, that they've been given bad news and they are not sure what to do with it. And yet we know there is always hope. God says to those who have no hope "You're wrong. There's always hope." Because there's not only this life, there is a life to come. And the life that we have here, if it's lived full, no matter when we go home to God, we have lived our life full.



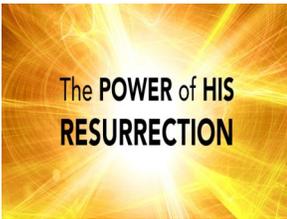
It was in that first century, in those early days, when there was a lot of chaos. A man named Jesus Christ, who we know as our Savior, had been involved in something that he didn't see himself as a political man. He was trying to show God's love but it became very political. So political that his grave, according to their customs he was locked in there and the guards were so worried that someone might steal his body and make it look like this man came back to life. But we know the rest of the story: the angels came, the guards passed out, his body, indeed was resurrected to new life and the rumors continued to spread that he is not only alive but he's going around and changing lives all the time. You see, there's hope and God will not take no for the answer. Those who say there is no hope, there's not tomorrow, God says, "You're fools."



I had given reflection earlier this morning at the cemetery of those who have watched the Olympics. There are a lot of those people who made it to the Olympics who sometime along their journey when they were skating and falling and skiing and falling and doing all the things they did and some of them probably had broken bones and torn ligaments and people said, "You'll never do it. You'll never make it." And there was still a gold and a silver and a bronze and somebody won because they didn't give up their hope.



Of all the gifts that God has given us, it is hope to know that it's not over. We have the Kingdom of God living in and through us and even for those who have gone on before us, the saints live through us. I am old enough now that I have a lot of those saints who talked to me: the family, the friends, the people who have molded my faith, have shaped my faith, have put me on a path toward righteousness.



I fall like the skiers and like the skates and I'm not yet who I want to be, but by God's grace God says, "I still have some more life ahead of you. There's joy; there's opportunity; there's resurrection and new life. Every time I fall, every time I sin, every time I get off the path I am reminded there is a possibility of new life. The Apostle Paul, of all people, was one of the most feared of all in his day because he was seeing to it that others who named themselves as followers of Christ were jailed or perhaps even taken to death. You want to know something about resurrection power? A man who was doing that was transformed to be perhaps the greatest spokesperson for Christ at the time. Even though he was after the backs of Peter, James and John, he became the one who gave life to others and we continue to study his word to day in the Word of God, because he knew once he found the living Christ that he wanted to live for him in prison and out to sea and wherever he found himself he basically said, "I just wish you were like me, that you could be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ."



What was his message to us? The same one that Christ has given us all the days of our life: Do something. Take the gifts, the mentors, your parents and grandparents and neighbors and friends and teachers, those who have molded you and shaped you into the being you are today and the gifts that Almighty God has given you, take them in their fullness and offer them as a gift to Almighty God that God's kingdom would come because of you...Christ living in you, though you, abiding in you every day.

If the Apostle Paul could find new life, that's the hope for all of us, that no matter where we have been, nothing makes us irreconcilable in the face of God. God says, "Come here, all you who are labored, heavy laden, burdened; those of you who feel unworthy; those of you who feel unloved; those of you who feel lonely, come to me. I love you." There is nothing you can do to take away the resurrection power of God and don't let anyone steal it from you, because God says you have been made created in His image. And God's waiting on all of us to bring His Kingdom into fullness.

We praise God for that gift today and as we praise God we are reminded on this Easter Sunday as we receive these gifts of the holy bread and wine that we are reminded of his love for us that we might not only have life, but we might have it abundantly.

I invite you to turn your hearts to God at this time as we confess ourselves before God and receive these gifts of bread and wine.

Benediction:



The Spirit of Jesus Christ is alive in our hearts, as is the spirit of those who have gone on before because the resurrection of new life is ours. Every day is a day of new life. We go forth from here taking God's light into the world that we might find resurrection and provide that gift of new life to others. Go in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit and give life. Amen.