

**Adult Education – St. Luke’s Church – Sedona, AZ**  
**Studies on the Daily Lectionary – Lent V – I Corinthians 15:12-16:24**  
**Week of April 7, 2019**

Refer to the class materials for March 3 for the Introduction to I Corinthians. Link:

<http://www.episcopalnet.org/PDF/Class%2005%20-%20Galatians%206%20-%20Ash%20Wed%20-%20I%20Cor%201-2.pdf>

For an introductory audio recording pertaining to this week’s lessons, click on the YouTube window:

<http://www.episcopalnet.org/DBS/Sedona/AdultEducation2019.html>

**Monday – I Corinthians 15:12-19. *If Christ Be Not Risen, Then Is Our Preaching in Vain***

**12** Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? **13** But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: **14** And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. **15** Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. **16** For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: **17** And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. **18** Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. **19** If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

v. 15; *if so be that*; if it is true that

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**Exegesis:** In last Saturday’s lesson, Paul reminded the Corinthians of the simple fundamentals of the Gospel: (1) Christ died for our sins; (2) He was buried; and (3) God raised Him up on the third day. (I Corinthians 15:3-4) Furthermore – Paul reminded them – the truth of the Gospel was borne out by a multitude of witnesses who saw Jesus – bodily – after his resurrection (15:5-11). However, despite this eyewitness testimony, some Corinthians continued to doubt the resurrection of the dead (v. 12).

Accepting those doubts momentarily for the purpose of argument, Paul – in today’s lesson – paints a bleak picture of the consequences. If there is no resurrection, the Corinthians’ faith is in vain; the apostles have proven to be false witnesses; the Corinthians have not been delivered from sin; the believers who have already died will not be resurrected; and those who vainly believed in Christ’s resurrection are “of all men most miserable” (vv. 13-19). Everything... absolutely *everything*... hinges on the *historical fact* of the resurrection. Otherwise, everything Paul has preached is merely a lie and a house of cards. Neither a doctrine of the immortality of the soul (such as some Jews believed in) nor a shadowy afterlife (such as some Gentiles believed in) would do. Those who believed, mistakenly, in the resurrection were of all men “most miserable” (v. 19) because they would essentially be devoting their lives on a falsehood.

**Exposition:** As inhabitants of the twenty-first century, with its advantages of modern scholarship, science and technology, we often apply a sort of chronological chauvinism against those who lived centuries before, assuming that they must have been unduly credulous, given to believing nearly anything that offered hope of release from what, for most, was a pretty drab and hard-scrabble existence. Nothing could be further from the truth. The first century Jews and Greeks were every bit as skeptical and hard to convince as any modern, hard-core agnostic. The Jewish Sadducees (including the High Priests of Jesus’ time: Annas and Caiaphas) flatly denied the resurrection. Although the Pharisees believed in the resurrection, they certainly did not think of Jesus – who had been scandalously crucified as a criminal – as being a candidate for resurrection at all and *certainly not* as the resurrected Son of God. The Greeks (as illustrated by the polite but skeptical Athenians in Acts 17:16-34) were every bit as hard to convince as the Jews.

Did Paul, and the other apostles, and the women at the tomb, and the five hundred brethren all truly see the resurrected, living Jesus? Certainly, Paul’s dramatic conversion and his willingness to suffer indescribable physical suffering attest to that fact. And, as discussed in connection with last Saturday’s lesson (15:1-11), modern scholarship has established that the Gospel had already been reduced to credal form perhaps as early as six months after the resurrection. That is unlikely to have happened without the supporting testimony of numerous eyewitnesses. Ultimately, though, absent a physical appearance by Jesus to every believer, faith comes into the equation, and we are confronted with a critical decision described by C.S. Lewis in *God in the Dock*: “Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of no importance, and, if true, of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important.”

**Questions for Reflection:** Do I believe in the resurrection of the dead? Do I always act as if I do, or am I more like the “men most miserable” at times (v. 19)?

**Spiritual Resolve:** \_\_\_\_\_

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20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. 21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. 24 Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. 27 For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. 28 And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

29 Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead? 30 And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? 31 I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. 32 If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink: for tomorrow we die.

33 Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. 34 Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.

v. 31: *I protest by your rejoicing*; I protest, brethren, by my pride in you

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**Exegesis:** Fortunately, Paul abandons the horribly depressing hypothetical of yesterday's lesson and affirmatively announces that Christ has, in fact, risen from the dead. Today's lesson begins a lengthy exposition on the resurrection which continues through Thursday's lesson.

Christ is the "firstfruits of them that slept" (v. 20) because he is the first to have been resurrected from the dead. Although Jesus restored Lazarus and Jairus' daughter from the dead (John 11:1-41; Luke 8:40-56), they eventually died a second time and, to this day, they await resurrection with all others who have fallen asleep.

Paul's reference to the "firstfruits" is almost certainly a reference to the Hebrew Festival of Weeks in which the first sheaf of the barley harvest, representing the entire harvest, was brought to the temple and was consecrated to God. This occurred annually on the day after the celebration of the Passover. (Leviticus 23:9-14)

One scholar has cataloged over sixty interpretations of verse 29 (baptism for the dead), but it is best to read the verse literally: apparently, in those days some believers were baptized for dead friends and relatives. This ritual seems to have persisted in certain groups for a few centuries before it died out. Paul does not condemn the practice, but neither does he endorse it. Here, he refers to the practice merely as a rhetorical device to underscore the Corinthians' belief in the resurrection.

Verse 32 is puzzling in that the book of Acts does not relate an encounter with "wild beasts" while Paul was in Ephesus. In fact, as a Roman citizen, Paul could have claimed an exemption from such treatment. Paul clearly has a specific, traumatic incident in mind, though, and his point is that he would not have willingly gone through it but for his unshakeable belief in the resurrection.

Paul's lament that if the dead are not raised then he and the Corinthians might as well "eat and drink: for tomorrow we die" (v. 32) recalls Jeremiah's condemnation of the inhabitants of Judah for holding precisely that attitude. (Isaiah 23: 13) This hedonistic outlook would also have been familiar and tempting to many Gentiles.

Finally, Paul's quotation: "evil communications corrupt good manners" (v. 33) is taken from Menander's comedy, "Thais," (4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) and is better translated in the RSV as "bad company ruins good morals." Paul's point seems to be that the Corinthians should avoid (or at least not be unduly influenced by) those who deny the resurrection and/or subscribe to hedonistic lifestyles.

**Exposition:** Paul's lengthy instruction to the Corinthians on the nature and the timing of the resurrection (extending through the remainder of the chapter) has been the principle Lesson in the The Order for the Burial of the Dead since the first Prayer Book in 1549. (BCP, pp. 328-30) Two shorter alternatives were later added in the 1928 revision (BCP, pp. 330-31).

**Questions for Reflection:** Are things subdued unto Jesus in my life (v. 28)? What things aren't? Am I one of those who stand in jeopardy every hour (v. 30)? If I'm not, who are these folks? Am I helping or hindering the Faith and the faithful? Do I believe verse 33?

**Spiritual Resolve:** \_\_\_\_\_

**35** But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? **36** Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: **37** And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: **38** But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.

**39** All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds.

**40** There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. **41** There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory.

**42** So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: **43** It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: **44** It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. **45** And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. **46** Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. **47** The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. **48** As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. **49** And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

v. 36: *is not quickened*; does not come to life

v. 35: *quickening*; life-giving

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**Exegesis:** After a bit of a digression in verses 29-34 in yesterday’s lesson, Paul resumes his detailed instruction on the nature and the timing of the resurrection. The key point in today’s lesson is that the resurrected body will not be a carbon copy, a re-creation, or a clone of the body that died. Paul might have been refuting a belief, most clearly stated in the non-canonical book of II Baruch, that the body would be resurrected without any change: “For the earth will then assuredly restore the dead...making no change in their form, but as it has received, so will it restore them” (II Baruch 50:2) Rather – Paul explains – our resurrected bodies will be imperishable (v. 42), glorified (v. 43), powerful (v. 43), spiritual (v. 44) and heavenly (v.49). But, make no mistake, it is *our* body that is resurrected. Otherwise, there would have been no empty tomb after Jesus was resurrected. And, Jesus would not have later said when he appeared to the apostles: “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.” (Luke 24:39) Nor would we proclaim in the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe in...the resurrection of *the body*.”

**Exposition:** Although the Exegesis provides some basis for answering the Question for Reflection, take a look also at Philippians 3:20-21, Romans 8:9-11 and I John 3:2. Also, consider this quote:

Paul...thought of the resurrected Jesus neither as a corpse which had regained the ability to breathe and walk nor as a ghost. He regarded Jesus as 'first fruits' of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20) and thought that all Christians would become like him. He denied that the resurrected body would be the “natural” body, but maintained that it would be a “spiritual” body (1 Cor. 15:44-6). “Not a natural body” excludes a walking corpse, while “spiritual body” excludes a ghost (which would be called in Greek simply a “spirit”, pneuma). *Positively, there would be continuity between the ordinary and the resurrected person*, as there was in the case of Jesus. To express this, Paul used the simile of a seed, which, when planted, is in one form, but when grown, in another (1 Cor. 15:36-38).

E.P. Sanders, *Paul*, p. 29; italics added.

**Question for Reflection:** What is the spiritual body going to be like (vv. 42-44)?

**Spiritual Resolve:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**50** Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

**51** Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, **52** In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. **53** For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. **54** So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. **55** O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? **56** The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. **57** But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. **58** Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

v. 50: *corruption*; the perishable; *incorruption*: the imperishable

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**Exegesis:** Verse 50 is, logically, a conclusion to yesterday’s lesson. Paul underscores the point that this life and the life to come involve entirely separate types of existence.

In I Thessalonians, Paul informs us that “the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” (I Thessalonians 4:16-18) In today’s lesson, Paul is not as clear about the order of resurrection, but he leaves no doubt about its suddenness: “we shall all be changed *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*” (vv. 51-52). The Greek word translated as “moment” in both the KJV and the RSV is “*atomos*,” meaning an uncut, indivisible moment of time.

Interestingly, one of the more credible theories on how the image was formed on the Shroud of Turin (the alleged burial shroud of Jesus) is by an unimaginably intense burst of radiation lasting no more than 40 to 50 billionths of a second. If that is how long it took to resurrect Jesus’ body, that is about as close to *atomos* as one can get!

The “saying” referenced in verse 54 comes from Isaiah 25:8: “He will swallow up death in victory; and the LORD GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces...” Similarly, Paul refers to Hosea 13:14 in verse 55: “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction...”

The “sting of death” (v. 56) is not death *per se*, it is *sin* – unforgiven sin. Because of the victory *through our Lord Jesus Christ* (v. 57) that sting has been taken away. Thus, the believer has nothing to fear from death, and this knowledge should result in believers who are steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding in the Lord’s work (v. 58).

**Exposition:** It is difficult to read verses 51-53 without hearing in the background the wonderfully beautiful aria from Handel’s *Messiah*: “The Trumpet Shall Sound.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13DpmWPV9IU>. Handel composed *Messiah* in only twenty-four days(!), but despite its seemingly inspired origin, it had a rather rocky debut, with no less than Johnathan Swift, author of *Gulliver’s Travels*, threatening to forbid singers from participating in its performance. (<https://www.bsomusic.org/stories/5-things-you-might-not-know-about-handels-messiah.aspx>)

**Questions for Reflection:** How “steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” am I (v. 58)? How can I become more so; what must I set aside in my life? Am I willing to do so, by God’s grace? Will I? When?

**Spiritual Resolve:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1** Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. **2** Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. **3** And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. **4** And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me.

**5** Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia: for I do pass through Macedonia. **6** And it may be that I will abide, yea, and winter with you, that ye may bring me on my journey whithersoever I go. **7** For I will not see you now by the way; but I trust to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit.

**8** But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. **9** For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.

**10** Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do. **11** Let no man therefore despise him: but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me: for I look for him with the brethren.

**12** As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time.

**13** Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. **14** Let all your things be done with charity.

v. 2: *lay by him in store*; put something aside; *that there be no gatherings when I come*; so that contributions need not be made when I come

v. 3: *approve*; accredit

v. 9: *and effectual*; for effective work

v. 10: *he may be with you without fear*; you put him at ease

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**Exegesis:** In the portion of Galatians in which Paul defends his apostleship, he recounts how he went to Jerusalem to verify that he and the other apostles were preaching the same Gospel. (Galatians 2:1-10) Having received that confirmation from Peter, James and John, Paul and Barnabas were sent back out to preach to the Gentiles, with the proviso that they “remember the poor” (Galatians 2:10) Paul took this admonition to heart, and he often mentioned the importance of this collection, such as in verses 1-4. Apparently, though, the collection at Corinth did not go smoothly, because Paul found it necessary to devote two chapters to the topic in his subsequent letter to the Corinthians. (II Corinthians 8-9) However, by the time Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans, about 56 A.D., Paul was ready to deliver the collection – derived from churches throughout Macedonia and Achaia – to the saints in Jerusalem. (Romans 15:25-28)

Paul does not encourage the Corinthians to adhere to a strict tithe (which would be to adhere to the Law, from which they had been freed) but to give proportionally “as God hath prospered” each individual (v. 2). As our Bishop says: Don’t give until it hurts; give until it feels good!

Verse 2 contains the first written account of the “first day of the week” (*i.e.*, Sunday) holding any special significance in the life of the early church, something which is clearly confirmed later in Acts 20:7: “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread...”

Whether Paul was able to carry out his travel plans as described in verses 5-8 is a matter of scholarly debate based on variant readings of passages from II Corinthians, Romans, Acts, Titus and this epistle.

Paul previously mentioned in 4:17 that he would be sending Timothy to the Corinthians to remind them of the fundamentals of the Gospel, and verse 10 in today’s lesson suggests that Timothy’s arrival would follow the delivery of this epistle. Paul urges the Corinthians to receive Timothy cordially, perhaps in part because Paul’s epistle contains so much corrective – even scolding – language.

Paul’s reference to Apollos in verse 12 contains no hint of jealousy over the Paul-Apollos divisions that he excoriates in chapters 1-4. Indeed, Paul was eager for Apollos to visit the Corinthians separately.

**Exposition:** Although chapter 16 consists predominantly of personal greetings, Paul inserts a succinct summary of his entire epistle in the middle: “Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love (vv. 13-14 RSV). Love – the more excellent way – is given primary place.

**Questions for Reflection:** Am I doing the things listed in verses 13-14? When I don't do these things, what stops me?

**Spiritual Resolve:** \_\_\_\_\_

15 I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) 16 That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth.

17 I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied. 18 For they have refreshed my spirit and yours: therefore acknowledge ye them that are such.

19 The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. 20 All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss.

21 The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand. 22 If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha. 23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. 24 My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

v. 15: *firstfruits*; first converts; *addicted*; devoted

v. 17: *for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied*; because they have made up for your absence

v. 22: *Anathema*; Accursed; *Maranatha*; Our Lord, come!

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**Exegesis:** Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus are not mentioned elsewhere in Paul’s epistles or in Acts. They are among the thousands of first-century Christians whose courage, steadfastness and *agapē* love laid the foundations for generations of Christians to follow, and their presence “refreshed” Paul’s spirit (v. 18). (Would *my* presence refresh Paul’s spirit?)

Paul likely wrote to the Corinthians from Ephesus (in Asia) around 55 A.D., which explains his reference to “the churches in Asia” (v. 19). You will recall that Paul stayed with Aquila and Priscilla (fellow tentmakers) during his eighteen-month stay in Corinth. (Acts 18:1-11) They later departed with him for Ephesus. (Acts 18:18)

The “holy kiss” (v. 20) is mentioned several other times in Paul’s epistles: Roman 16:16; II Corinthians 13:12; and I Thess. 5:26. Justin Martyr, writing around 155 A.D., mentions exchanging the “holy kiss” as part of the worship service leading up to the administration of the sacraments. (*Apology* I. 65)<sup>1</sup>

It is unclear why the KJV translators left “Anathema” untranslated here, where in other places they appropriately translated it as “accursed.” (I Corinthians 12:3; Romans 9:3; Galatians 1:8-9) Maranatha, on the other hand, is an Aramaic word which Paul, writing in Greek, used untranslated in this epistle.

As with all of his epistles, Paul closes here with a benediction. It is worth noting that he emphasizes his love for the Corinthians despite the harsh words it has been necessary for him to use in certain passages of the letter.

**Exposition:** Often, modern Bible translations help to clarify language that is dated or obscure in the Authorized (King James) version. Not infrequently, however, the KJV translation is preferable. For example, the KJV translation of verse 1 – including the parenthetical interruption of “ye know the house of Stephanas...” – is more accurate than the Revised Standard Version, which moves “I beseech you, brethren” to the beginning of verse 16, not because that is a more accurate translation but because the text reads more smoothly. In the process, the RSV eliminates an element of spontaneity in the original text which also lends a sense of authenticity to that text. Bible translators bear a huge responsibility in their task, and it is often helpful to compare multiple translations. In preparing these lessons I have referred frequently to:

- The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha – Revised Standard Version (my go-to version after the KJV)
- The New American Bible – Revised Edition (used predominantly by the Roman Catholic church)
- The English Standard Version (a highly useful and reliable modern translation, lacking somewhat in esthetic appeal because of its emphasis on literal translation)
- New American Standard Bible (popular among evangelicals as one of the more literal translations)
- The New English Bible with the Apocrypha (highly regarded when it was released in the 1960s, but it has lost traction since then)
- The Interpreter’s Bible (a 12-volume set containing extensive exegesis and exposition; available at the Sedona Public Library)
- The Good News Bible – Today’s English Version (highly recommended for ease of reading – particularly Old Testament passages, but always cross-check with other translations for serious study)

**Question for Reflection:** Whom do I know that is anathematized (v. 22)? Are there any such folks who call themselves Christian?

**Spiritual Resolve:** \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-firstapology.html>