

**Foundations: THE RESURRECTION**  
**I Corinthians 15:1-4, 50-58 (AFBC 4/1/18)**

Eight Sundays ago, on the fourth day of February, we began our journey toward Easter. After spending much of last year considering some of the foundational passages from the Old Testament, I promised you we would begin 2018 clearly focused on Jesus—and so we have.

On that first Sunday in February, we remembered “the Last Supper” by sharing Communion together... in a different way.

Of course, it was so cold and rainy that morning, the biggest difference is how that, after some prodding, we sat much closer to the front of the sanctuary—I thought that was kinda’ nice!

The following Sunday, we began looking at the last words Jesus spoke from His cross. We’ve attempted to discover the significance of these seven precious statements—literally, the “dying words” of our Lord—we’ve searched together for the deeper meanings of these words for our lives today.

But think about this—especially today, on Easter Sunday. Why do these words matter so much to us? Why do we keep going back to them to hear their message again?

Isn’t it because, unlike the dying words of so many others, these were not the last words our Lord spoke. In fact, we believe that the risen Lord spoke to His followers after His death on the cross and that He is still speaking to us today!

Now, it would be a powerful story even if this had been the end of it—an inspiring story of a good and courageous man who refused to give in to all the anger and hatred that was heaped upon him.

We notice this about Jesus (His grace under pressure!) because we are prone to lash out at others—even under much less trying circumstances. No way we’re going to let anyone push us around!

Unlike Jesus, we tend to succumb to the pressures of those moments and quickly forget God’s will... and His ways.

We all do this at times, don't we? I think so--all of us, that is, with the exception of Jesus. Only Jesus' story is lived out consistently and perfectly according to the Father's will.

Still, if this were all there was to the story of Jesus, I doubt that any of us would have ever heard it. What I'm getting at is, had it not been for the resurrection of Jesus Christ--His story would never have been told.

It certainly would not have survived, let alone have been as cherished as it is, for two thousand years. Oh, I suppose those who were closest to Jesus would have talked about Him for a while.

They would have remembered how his words moved them and how they had hoped that He was God's Messiah, their Savior. But take away the Resurrection, and what are the chances the story of Jesus would have lasted?

This is why Paul, in the Scripture we read earlier, labeled Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection as being "of first importance!" Simply put, Jesus' resurrection is foundational to all we know and believe about Him. It is THE foundation, the immovable bedrock beneath the Christian faith and the Christian way of living.

It was the resurrection that placed God's final stamp of approval on Jesus. It confirmed what the Father said about Him at his baptism. We considered this passage back on the very first Sunday in January as we talked about Jesus' authority:

**"And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.'" (Mark 1:11)**

Jesus faithfully lived out the Father's will—even unto death on a cross—thus His Gospel is alive and well, and just as exciting and life-changing for us today as it was for those who first heard the Good News: "He's not here. He's risen."

Think about it. Without the resurrection, all the story of Jesus would be is a tragic tale that gives us even more reason to be despondent about the human condition.

Minus the resurrection, we might as well forget about trying to do God's will and simply live in the same self-serving ways that we observe among Jesus' enemies and sadly, far too often, even among those who claim to be his friends.

If Jesus is still in the grave, then He only mistakenly assumed He was doing the Father's will—and we shouldn't let what He did and said back then influence how we live now. We'd be just as well off sticking with our most base instincts—don't you think?

The old television sitcom called "All in the Family" has been getting some press lately. Archie Bunker's beliefs and attitudes seem to be making a comeback, you know--sad, but true!

Back in the day, many of us could relate to that show because we all knew someone who was just like Archie, or Edith, or Gloria, or Meathead. In fact, sometimes the show bothered us—it took on the role of a mirror, and it helped us see something about ourselves! Often the reflection was not very flattering.

You remember how Archie was always complaining? Well, one day, Archie was all upset with Edith—but for an unusual reason. He insists that she's (quote) "too good!"

"That's you, all right," Archie says, "Edith the Good. You'll stoop to anything to be good. You never yell. You never swear. You never make nobody mad. You think it's easy living with a saint?"

Then he adds, "Even when you cheat, you don't cheat to win. You cheat to lose. Edith, you ain't human!"

Finally, even Edith's patience has been stretched too thin. She responds: "That's a terrible thing to say, Archie Bunker. I am just as human as you are."

"Oh yeah," says Archie, "then prove it. Do something rotten!"

Edith, you see, was a kind of "Jesus figure" in the show. Her life was so full of doing good and taking care of others that she had no time for anything rotten. Old Archie was on to something, though. Sadly, all of us have at least the capacity to be rotten!

What our sin did to Jesus on the cross shows just how ugly sin is—and how rotten all of us can be because of it... when we ignore God's will and don't follow His ways for our lives. That's what sin is!

This is another reason we need to pray the prayer our Lord taught us, "Thy will be done." Left to our own wills, we make a mess of things. Not our will, but THY will be done. Please, God—Thy will.

Jesus' crucifixion holds up before us the tragic consequences of our sin. But then the resurrection takes this tragedy and turns it into a beautiful love story! The ugliness of the cross becomes the incredibly powerful story of God's love for His Son... and for us.

There's a verse in the Song of Solomon that says: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it" (8:7). Jesus endured an overwhelming flood of hatred, abuse, and raging evil. But this all led to His resurrection—which assures us that the one unquenchable thing in this world is the love of God.

This is why we believe in eternal life. When we enter by faith into a relationship with the Lord, we experience a close, loving communion with God. The ravages of time are helpless against it. No injury or disease can overcome it. No tragedy can blot it out.

This relationship transcends even death itself. As Paul said in Romans, "There is absolutely nothing that can ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."  
(Romans 8:39)

Francis Bacon, the English statesman and philosopher who's considered to be the father of the scientific method, was also a man of faith. He had a picture engraved on his bookplate.

The image was of a small ship sailing out between the great Pillars of Hercules. Past those pillars, there was only a vast, uncharted, unknown ocean. Inscribed on the bow of the ship, however, was its proud and defiant name: *More Beyond*.

That's the Easter message, friends. For us, there's more beyond this life. During the weeks leading up to Easter, we talked about how Jesus submitted Himself so completely to the Father's will.

Even when this meant death on the cross, Jesus stayed the course. So today—Resurrection Day--we rejoice in the Good News that our Savior lives; and because He lives, we now know there's more beyond the grave.

A word of caution, though, lest our Easter celebrations become too *other*-worldly. If our lives are in Christ Jesus, there is also more in the here and now—not just in the great beyond.

Christ is not only with us when we cross over into eternity. His resurrection means He's also our constant companion now. Or to put this another way, Easter is not only about life AFTER death. It is also about life BEFORE death--life RIGHT NOW!

What Jesus accomplished is not just a victory over death, but over all the forces and tendencies in our lives that prevent us from living according to God's will. It's victory over our deepest fears and most nagging worries.

It's victory over our selfishness and envy, over impatience and insecurity—victory over all the other sins that separate us from God and from each other.

Luke tells us the story of the two disciples who were on the road to Emmaus. Jesus had risen, but they were slow to believe it. Their hearts were heavy—their spirits... downcast.

Suddenly a stranger drew near and began to walk along beside them. It was Jesus, but they didn't recognize Him at first. One thing they knew, however, was that as they walked and talked, this man brought them comfort, and courage, and peace.

So when they got to Emmaus, they asked him to stay with them. He agreed. And as they sat down to eat, the stranger took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them.

Then Luke tells us “**...their eyes were opened, and they recognized him...**” (Luke 24:31). It was the Lord—the Risen Christ--who had been with them all along.

On another occasion after the resurrection, some of the disciples were fishing on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus appeared to them in the

early morning. The disciples quickly made their way to shore, and they grilled some fish together and ate them.

These were special times of companionship—enjoying one of life’s richest blessings: just being together--sharing life together. To do this well, though—whether couples, friends, families, or community--we have to put God’s will ahead of our own.

Otherwise, we’ll find a way in our self-centeredness, to take good, healthy relationships and turn them into something wrong and unhealthy. This is why God’s way is so important for our lives today—every day--and not just when we come to the end of life.

Before Jesus returned to the Father, He assured His followers, telling them, “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” The resurrection is so foundational to our faith because it makes good on Jesus’ promise to never leave us—to always be near.

In Matthew, the angel tells the women--those first visitors to the empty tomb and thus the first proclaimers of the Easter Gospel--to “...go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and, behold, he is going before you to Galilee...” (Mt. 28:7).

Jesus is “going before you,” the angel said. They *needed* to hear that! We do too! We need to know that in every endeavor of life, Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord and Savior, goes before us.

Whatever challenges we face—whether it’s something traumatic or just the normal cares and concerns of life—through it all, our Lord is with us.

And then, when we make that final journey of life, when it’s our turn to descend into the shadowy valley of death, we’ll know that our Risen Lord is with us, to help us find our way home.

Faust (fr. German legend), in order to have all the power, wealth, and worldly pleasures he desired, made a deal with the devil. He did this believing that “the end of everything is nothing.”

There are many in our world who think this way, friends; and they live their lives accordingly. Without the Resurrection, we have no good reason to think otherwise.

But because we know and follow a risen Lord, we can affirm with the Apostle Paul that we are “sure that he who began a good work in us will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

The great artist Rembrandt said that a picture is finished only when it has fully expressed the artist’s intentions. You might think of our lives as God’s artwork. He created us for eternity.

Along the way, we got scarred and broken by sin; but through His grace and forgiveness in Christ Jesus, God remakes our lives. He brings us to our intended completion--eternity with Him.

Now, we don’t fully understand what this will be like. As Paul expressed it, “**...now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully...**” (I Corinthians 13:12).

What we know of God and His heaven is but a shadowy reflection. We’ve all heard that mirrors in those days were just polished metal. Their images were distorted, unclear.

What is Paul saying? In this life, we see dimly, we know only in part; and thus we’re left with much that’s mystery—a lot that we don’t understand. But we trust in God’s love and in what we are sure will be His good plans for our lives.

We believe our Lord when He tells us that He’s “prepared a place for us”--an eternal home in heaven. In every way, friends, His plans are good.

His will is what we should follow because it’s best. It’s the way to life—fullness of life, eternal life.

The Apostle Paul taught us to refer to this life in Christ as “Victory!” Even in the midst of sadness—victory! Even in the face of death—victory! Let’s keep on seeking God’s will, faithfully following in the ways our Risen Savior taught us.

And we will have abundant opportunities--both in this life, and the next--to say, “Thanks be to God... who gives us this VICTORY through our Lord Jesus Christ!” AMEN.

**Foundations: The Resurrection of Christ.....I Cor. 15:1-4, 50-58  
(Read responsively before the anthem and sermon)**

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

**For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...**

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

**For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."**

"Where, O death, is your victory?  
Where, O death, is your sting?"

**The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

**Our Father** (The Lord's Prayer)