Text: 1 Corinthian 15:1-20

**Introduction**

There is a meme that occasionally floats around the Christian internet. If the Apostle Paul had written a letter to the American. Oy. Where in hell do I start with you all.

**Text**

Of course the letter that those folks are thinking about is the first letter to the Corinthians. When you read through that letter and everything that Paul address in it, you might wonder to what extent they were Christian at all. He starts out addressing divisions within the church which sound like everyone has gone their own way. Paul defends apostolic authority as stewards of the mysteries of God. That phrase meaning official teachings and practices of the church. He takes them to task for sexual immorality that made even the pagans blush, and for their tendency to sue each other. He had to instruct them to leave the idols behind. To stop getting drunk while celebrating the Lord’s Supper. To stop chasing after flashy spiritual gifts at the expense of love and making a complete hash of worship.

And if you were to take 30 mins one afternoon to read it straight through, you’d feel the heat. We have a problem of thinking of Scripture as a form of the plaster saint. But Paul across 2000 years is a living, breathing, sometimes hyperventilating, sometimes bleeding writer. And after blistering the Corinthians for 14 chapters, it’s like he just stops and decides he has to go back to the start.

“Now…I would remind you brothers, of the gospel I preached to you.”

“Which you received”

“In which you stand”

“and by which you are being saved”

“if you hold fast to the word preached”

“Unless you believed in vain.”

After everything that has come in those 14 chapters its an amazing invitation of grace. Yes, it goes back to the very beginning. More on that in a second. But after everything Paul takes them to task for. The Apostle reminds them – “You received this.” You had it. It was yours. And he changes the tense. Not only was it yours, it is yours. You stand in this good news. And he changes the tense again. “You are being saved.” You are now saved and will continue to be saved in the good news. The proclamation and promise are good. God is faithful. God is faithful to you.

He is faithful: a) if you hold fast to the word preached and b) unless your faith is in vain.

**Christology**

And I think his next two paragraphs expand on those two thoughts. First, what is the Word preached?

“For I delivered to you.” Paul didn’t make it up. The Apostles did not invent this, but they received it, and have passed it on exactly like it was given to them. This is the real apostolic succession. This is the real rock the Jesus would build his church on. The living stones of those who received it and delivered it whole. From Cephas to the 12 to more than 500. To James and all the apostles. Last of all to me as the least of the apostles. It is that witness that comes down to us today. I preach what I have received. And whether it is Peter or Paul or the humblest preacher, “so we preach an so you believed.”

And what is the that core proclamation that we must hold fast to? “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” This is the good news. Right now you sins are forgiven. All the promises of the scriptures in these regards are yours today. Today is the day of grace. And how do we know this? Christ is risen.

The promises of God have been given to all of us in the scriptures. God made them known in advance. And they have been fulfilled in Christ. There is still a now and a not yet to this. Now we have the forgiveness of sins. Even if we must often deal with the effects of sin in this world. Now we still see death at work. But also now we have seen the resurrection of Jesus. Not yet have we put on that resurrection body. But Christ is risen, and we too shall rise.

**Moral**

So what are the ways that we might believe in vain?

First, if you are here today, but do not believe that proclamation – Christ is risen – why are you here? “If Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead.” We do not become angels as popular sayings might say. We are not recycled – Brahmin does not rejoin atman, nor do we cross the river lethe and return in a never ending cycle. Christ is risen. There is a resurrection of the dead. Not some pale thing, but a bodily resurrection. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. That is the Christian hope. And if you don’t believe that, your faith is vain.

Your faith is vain if the resurrection is not the proof that your sins are forgiven. If you are still dragging those things around against yourself, your faith is in vain. If you are refusing forgiveness to a brother or sister in the faith, your faith is vain. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. Christ is raised. Your sins are forgiven. Live like it.

Your faith is vain if you have no hope for those have fallen asleep. If they have perished in Christ they are with Christ and will return with him. Death has been defeated. He will come again with glory – with all his saints – to judge the living and dead. And that Kingdom will have no end.

And your faith is vain if it is only for the not yet. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ.” We are something the opposite of those pagans Paul preached to. They hoped in, they sacrificed to the gods, because they expected something now. Notice that Paul doesn’t deny this. If in this life only we hope in Christ. Our great hope is the resurrection. And that hope has eclipsed the now for us. But there is a now. Now you have the forgiveness of sins. Now you have the communion of the saints. Now you have peace with God and prayer. Now you have the grace of the sacraments. Now you have the Word. Now you have the Spirit and all His gifts. Your faith is vain if it is only for the not yet, and you do not grab hold of the now.

**Eschatological**

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits.”

This is the fact proclaimed. This is the promised word we hold fast to. This is what make is all real and not in vain.

Christ is risen. The first fruits. And for a while our lives might be hidden with Christ. But they will be revealed. The entire creation groans for their revelation. Like the seed that falls to the ground and dies it bears much fruit. Christ was buried and risen as the first fruits. And He bears much fruit. Of which you are part of that harvest. If you hold fast to the word preached and your faith is not in vain.