

**Sunday 13 February 2022**  
**Holy Trinity – Holy Communion (8.00am)**  
**3 before Lent**

1 Corinthians 15:12-20  
Luke 6:17-26

Our Gospel reading this morning contains Luke's account of what we are now used to calling the Beatitudes. This and Matthew's slightly different version usually come up twice a year and are, therefore, preached on regularly. So, I want this morning to take a different tack and look briefly at our other reading from 1 Corinthians.

Paul's discussion about the resurrection in this passage has fascinated scholars and Christians alike. It clearly shows that, right from the very beginning, witness to Christ's resurrection was up front and central in the earliest Christian teaching.

It's hard for us to imagine what the Church was like before the Gospels were written down, before the creeds were agreed, before the faith settled into the shape that we are familiar with today.

Everything was up for grabs; everything could be contested.

And, just to show that there is nothing new under the Church's sun, it is very clear from what Paul says that there has been considerable debate amongst the Corinthian Christians about the nature and reality of the resurrection.

We should remember that Paul is writing this letter barely fifteen or twenty years after Jesus' actual death and resurrection, and only three years or so after the church in Corinth had been established.

So, what was the problem?

Why were they so exercised about Jesus' resurrection?

We don't know for sure, but perhaps it was down to the fact that maybe they had just seen the first of their believers die, be buried and yet, much to their disappointment, remain dead and un-resurrected.

Before we get too critical of those early Corinthian Christians we shouldn't forget how shocking the idea of resurrection was to most people at that time and, even more so, the idea of the value and preciousness of each life, not just powerful ones, that it affected.

Life was cheap in the first century Middle East and Mediterranean.

In the face of all that, in a "let's sort this out once and for all" kind of way, Paul was preaching that believing in the resurrection of the dead, and Jesus' own resurrection specifically, is of central importance to our faith.

It is not an optional extra to be ditched when it seems too difficult to continue believing in it.

If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then everything that Paul has taught the Corinthians about the nature and purpose of God is called into question. Paul sets out in detail in these verses, for all of Christian history, an unmistakeable connection between the resurrection of Christ and the promise of the general resurrection of the dead.

This theme comes up in almost every verse.

One resurrection depends on the other, he says.

Because we know that Christ has been raised (after all, there are plenty of witnesses to that), then we can be sure and confident that there will be a resurrection from the dead. Paul preaches this truth believing from the depths of his whole being that God did, indeed, raise Christ.

And then, as if to hammer the point home, Paul tells them that, if Jesus is not resurrected then our faith is pointless and we are to be pitied if we only have faith and hope in Christ during this life.

So there, we had Paul talking to those first century Christians in the church at Corinth. What would he have to say to us twenty-first century Christians in the church in Penn?

It is, of course, relatively easy to have confidence in Christ when things are all going well.

But when life takes a trickier turn we might have to reconsider what it means to believe in a resurrected Saviour and to have hope in Jesus.

Because hope is the beating heart of our faith.

Hope for a change in circumstances.

Hope for a change of heart.

Hope for understanding, reconciliation, peace.

Hope for a brighter tomorrow.

Hope for a better future.

Hope is what gets us up in the morning and keeps us going.

There is a saying you might have heard that goes along the lines of..

"Sometimes, as Christians, we become so heavenly minded that we are no earthly use".

However, there is also an opposite danger whereby our thinking is so grounded in the earth that we forget to nurture our vision of heaven.

There is a proper tension between the two.

We are called as Christians to invest in heaven, where our greater treasure is and where our heart should lie. But we are called to invest in heaven primarily by investing in the Kingdom of God on earth.

We can do that by sticking to these three special values...

The Scriptures...

Christian community...

Individual encounter with God...

Perhaps now, as we approach the weeks of Lent, is a good time to seek out a balance in these three things, picking up your Bible, committing to Church and seeking out God for yourself.

**Amen.**