

1 Corinthians 15:12,16-20February 15, 2009 – 6th SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**HOPE BEYOND THIS LIFE**☠ **futile faith lies in sin (vv.12,16-19)**✚ **Firstfruits for those who sleep (v.20)**

In the name of Jesus, our risen Savior, dearly redeemed:

Two amazing things are on my mind this morning. First, I'm amazed at this awesome "Book of Books" with sixty-six shorter books, all inspired by God the Holy Spirit. This Holy Bible is so simple and clear a child can understand it, yet so deep and profound that the greatest minds trip up trying to explain it. No other book dares claim God gave it directly and not through an angel. No other book is so hated to be banned and burned. No other book will touch your heart and bless your life with peace.

Secondly, I'm amazed how dense I am to understand and remember God's Holy Scriptures. Listening and reading all my life, fifty-six times from cover to cover – I'm grateful to be trained in the Wisconsin Synod to study the Old Testament in the original Hebrew, and the New Testament like this in Greek. Yet I'm constantly proving how true God is when He asks: "*Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to me, blind like the servant of the LORD?*" (Isaiah 42:19 NIV) So blind and deaf myself, how can I ever hold out **Hope Beyond This Life?**

☠ **futile faith lies in sin (vv.12,16-19)**

Some of you will remember a few weeks ago in Bible class when I said only one miracle of our Lord Jesus is reported in all four Gospels, when Jesus fed the 5,000. So said the chart in my study Bible. But one of the class participants asked, "Aren't you forgetting one?" "Which one?" "The resurrection." Ah, yes, the greatest miracle of all. Without the resurrection we are lost and **Futile faith lies in sin.**

Maybe you don't care. Your life flows along like a rubber raft in the warm sunshine as you listen to the water. But you're deaf to people shouting from the shoreline. Eyes closed, you cannot see the spray from the falls. Life's sudden plunge will not land in a blue lagoon, but a fire pit from which none but one has ever returned. Despite your comfort, sin brings eternal death. And sin is not just the bad things we say and do, but all the good things we've left undone and the kind words we failed to say.

Imagine a teenage girl running through the forest in a cheerleaders outfit, terrified as if someone were chasing her. Suddenly the camera stops. "Bad acting," her director shouts. Her screams were not convincing. Everyone turns their backs as she walks away. But then she really starts screaming. She broke through an underground pit and landed on a skeleton. Now she's not faking at all.

Without God's Holy Book we could only scream. **Futile faith lies in sin** where we fell when our first parents, Adam and Eve, rebelled against God. In that deep, dark pit we would be lost forever, if God had not sent His Son to die and rise again for us. People wonder if God is perfect, how could suffering come into the world? But God reveals in this Great Resurrection Chapter, "*Death came through a man....*" (15:21) **Hope Beyond This Life** to escape from hell's fire pit hangs here: "*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.*"

Why say, "No!" to sinful passions and desires if God did not send His Son to die for sin, or left Him rotting in some forgotten grave? Why bear the world's hatred if our Messiah is as dead as Mohammed or Buddha or the previous Pope? It would mean nothing when Jesus promises: "*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in*

that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets." (Luke 6:20-23 NIV) If Jesus is still dead, He cannot deliver in life and certainly not in death. Then our **futile faith** still **lies in sin** in a death pit with no escape. Then we might as well worry about being rich and comfortable, feeding ourselves and forgetting the hungry, laughing like there's no tomorrow. Everything hangs on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That's why in just a few weeks the documentaries will disgrace cable again with scholars arguing against Christ's resurrection. For if He is alive, then He is God. Then everyone who rejects the God-Man Jesus is condemned to hell. They have no **Hope Beyond This Life**. They can only scold and complain. But we have **Hope** in the...

✠ **Firstfruits for those who sleep (v.20)**

Who was there when Columbus sailed the ocean blue? Do you believe it? My great grandfather scolded me July 20, 1969, for telling him they just landed on the moon. "But it's on TV, Grandpa!" "It's a conspiracy!" he shouted. Everyone has faith in something. You open your eyes, trusting you will see. You eat, trusting your stomach. You spend the "full faith and credit" of the USA. Flip the switch, you trust the lights go on. If I'm sick, I trust the doctor to help. That's why I love the Bible, written by the Great Physician of souls. God does not leave us in the dark. The dear Holy Spirit inspired the Bible to heal us of our sins and give us the faith to receive eternal life. *It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken."* *With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak.* (2 Corinthians 4:13 NIV)

This is what God says, and by His grace I believe: *"Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."* Jesus was ridiculed telling the mourners Jairus' daughter was *"not dead, but asleep."* But while they laughed, Jesus took her by the hand and said, *"My child, get up!" Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.* (Luke 8:52-56 NIV) Jesus was to die on the cross and rise again. He would not let popularity get in the way.

You don't need me to tell life is the pits. Children get sick. Loved ones die. Jobs and fortunes are lost in second. Wars and rumors of wars continue to the end just as Jesus promised. True peace is nowhere to be found except in this: *"Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."* Jesus came down into this death pit to live with us and for us. He carried the cause of all our sorrow and grief when He carried our sins to the cross. And when He shed His innocent blood, He washed away every stain of sin from our souls and all our guilt from God's record. The Holy Bible says, *"[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."* (Romans 4:25 NIV) And after He rose, then Jesus descended into the firepit of hell, not to suffer, but to proclaim His victory over sin, death and the devil. He ascended to God's right hand to rule all things for the good of His Church. God has kept His Word. We have **Hope Beyond This Life**.

Do you understand what this means for you that *"Christ [is]...the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep"*? Ancient Israelites gave *firstfruits* to the priests as offerings to thank God for the harvest and express their faith that more crops would grow. On His way to the cross Jesus told His disciples, *"Because I live, you also will live."* (John 14:19 NIV) He told Martha who was grieving for her brother Lazarus, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"* Faith answers with Martha, *"Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."* (John 11:25-27 NIV) That's why we offer our bodies to God and give Him the *"firstfruits"* of our income in offerings. We want to thank God for **Hope Beyond This Life** in Jesus who is the **Firstfruits of those who sleep**. Our life has not yet soared as high as it will. We still cannot feel or touch what God has promised, but because our Lord Jesus conquered death, we follow His Holy Word, praying for grace to believe and strength to do His will. Soon our prayers will not be needed and no one will have to tell us to *"praise the Lord."* We won't be able to stop shouting for all the happiness and health and holiness we will see and feel around and in us. Our **Hope Beyond This Life** will be fulfilled in one eternal song of thanks and praise to God. Jesus lives, the **Firstfruits of those who sleep**. The best is yet to be! Amen.