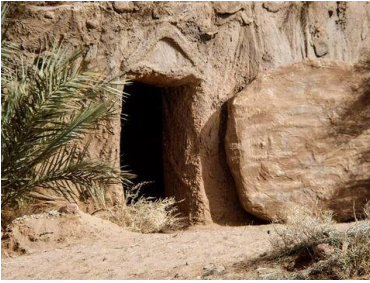


Power Lies Within!
Sermon for Easter Sunday
Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11



Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸

Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

Easter is a story of resurrection. While everyone was fast asleep, Jesus rose from the dead! And He didn't just rise from the dead. He awoke many from their deep sleep of sin and unbelief! Easter is a story of resurrection. And the first women who ran back to the city and called out: "The Lord is risen!" woke up the disciples and friends of Jesus and called them to believe. And yet today, there is so much doubt about what this belief in the resurrection actually means. So some people ask: Resurrection? From what am I waking up then? From the depths of winter into spring? Waking up after depression? Resurrection from strife to true peace? Yes, what is this belief in the resurrection anyway? First of all, it is obvious that a power lies in believing in the resurrection, that this belief has influenced generations and languages all over the world, and that it continues to do so today. But one can sleep through this belief in the resurrection by simply not being aware of it. To illustrate this, let me tell you the story of my friend who had a kind of sleeping sickness. Of all people, my friend who had this sleeping sickness was eventually hired to monitor the largest steam engine in a factory. He was supposed to do nothing else but stay awake and watch the gauge of the steam engine so that it wouldn't go into the red. On the one hand, you could see the great power contained within the machine by looking at the gauge. On the other hand, you could see that the whole factory lived off of the power of this machine! Everything depended upon this machine and without it, the factory couldn't operate. And still, you couldn't see what was going on within it. For exactly this purpose, my friend had a very important task – he didn't have to do anything else but monitor the gauge with eagle eyes. Well, as can be expected, my friend dozed off, the gauge went into the red, and there was a big disaster. Christians are, in some respects, similar to my friend monitoring his steam engine. The huge empty grave of Jesus stands before us today. We call out all over the place: He is risen! He is risen! We can observe the power of the resurrection throughout the history of the world because everywhere, for thousands of years, people have come to faith. And that still happens! But we don't really believe our gauge, the Bible, which tells us exactly what kind of power lies within this vessel. The Bible explains exactly what the empty grave means for us... it says there that Jesus will rise from the dead. It says that we too will rise from the dead through Jesus. There is such power in this! And yet, we sleep through it all. We are like my friend and his steam engine. We know what power lies within the machine. We can read all about it in God's Word. But just like my friend at the steam engine didn't quite believe the gauge and therefore fell asleep, we also don't believe in the resurrection and sleep through it, the most important point of our faith. This Easter, let's not celebrate an old tradition but a true resurrection festival, that is celebrate Easter not just in name, but in reality.

And here, Paul shows us the gauge upon which we can build our resurrection faith. Paul mentions three things which, in the church at that time, were like a kind of gauge or confession that the whole church supported in the early days: **1) Christ died for our sin, 2) Christ is risen, 3) Christ appeared to us.** The Apostle Paul refers to these three facts and knows soon after Jesus' resurrection that these three points are sustaining elements of our Church. Without these things, we can close up shop... The only question is why the Apostle Paul had to fight so hard for this faith and remind us of it? In addition to this, we can also ask why Christians had to struggle for this same faith for more than 2000 years already? Why do we need to be reminded and admonished again today that this faith sustains us and gives us life? Christ

died for our sin, Christ rose from the dead, Christ appeared to us. Believing in Jesus is not natural for us and this faith doesn't come naturally. For us, the resurrection is just a big black hole. We can't explain it. We don't need to search long to find the total contradiction of this very faith. The contradiction lies within every human being, In us as well! We can see this already in the apostles themselves. Again and again Jesus had to tell them that He must die and after three days, would rise again. And when the first part of Jesus' promise came true and He was actually crucified and buried, just as He had said, not one person had the idea that the second part of Jesus' promise could also be true. In truth, it would seem that the Romans and Jewish leaders understood Jesus' resurrection better because they were the ones who came up with the idea of closing Jesus' tomb with a seal so that no one could get into or out of the tomb. In those hours when Jesus was laid in the tomb, there was not even a hint of resurrection faith to be seen. On the contrary, the women are quite clueless as they go to the tomb. They just wanted to perform the Jewish burial rituals. We also look there in vain for Peter, John, or James who only want to see from afar what else could happen there at the grave. These disciples simply had no resurrection faith! It is very clear from the Gospels. The words about Jesus' resurrection had no meaning at all after His overwhelming death. Even when the angel appeared to the women, it took a while for the angel's words to finally pierce through their numb senses to catch a glimmer of resurrection faith. That's how convincing death is. That's how convincingly death fights against resurrection faith today. Sunday after Sunday we confess it together with all the Christians in the world: "The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty." But when I see my own aging body, when I sit at the bedside of a dying person, when I see the hopelessness of the many horrible wars of our time, I find it very difficult to believe in the resurrection. And even when I read a verse about the resurrection on the tombstone of a loved one, can I really believe that new life can arise from this pile of sand and ashes? The Apostle Paul warns: If we don't believe in the resurrection, then faith is meaningless, because then we aren't a congregation or a church, then I am like the person who sits next to this dynamic power of a machine but doesn't believe in the power that is within it.

And yet we see that God Himself steps into this mess and gives us this very faith in the resurrection. The accounts of the resurrection of Jesus Christ are beautiful accounts of how the faith of the Church becomes first a tiny bud, then it grows and becomes more and more joyful and confident, until finally, the disciples and the Apostle Paul himself, through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the face of mortal danger, joyfully proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's when we first see the women – sad and stooped, they go to the tomb to anoint His body...symbolically, they represent all the senseless dying of our world history. Then the sincere amazement which they can't hold in any longer and they run to the other disciples out of sheer joy. They tell everyone: HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! Oh how wonderful it would be if such living faith would spring up from our weary old bones. How wonderful when God steps in with His Spirit and banishes our unbelief to form living resurrection faith instead. How wonderful when we, with all Christians, discover the great adventure of the resurrection! When we can also recognize that Satan has actually already been finished off. All the wars, the fury in and around us, are all just side effects of a death that has long since been defeated. Instead of letting ourselves be frightened by death, we may, like the women at the tomb of Jesus, proclaim this resurrection faith with our whole body and with all our senses to everyone we meet. May we, as a whole church, proclaim to the world why we are here and what we are actually living for. Yes, and this resurrection faith may also shine into our very ordinary human circumstances. There, where people are separated from each other in bitterness and hatred, where people without a home are pushed to the margins of society, even where people are horribly murdered, a completely different melody steadily and unmistakably sounds. It is the melody of the One who has overcome death. It is the faith in the One who overcame the world. For those who have tasted it just once and drunk from the fountain of living water, there is no turning back. Everything is pointing to the new day of the Resurrection and New Life. My friend, who was watching the gauge on the great steam engine, slept through the power of the machine. Yet he should have known better. Other than the gauge, which constantly attested to the power within, he could have deduced from the whole operation of the factory that the power for it all comes from inside the big steam engine. Paul witnesses to us about what is within the church. One is the Word of God that Jesus died for our sin and rose again. The other is that the power of this very faith could be witnessed everywhere. Paul himself was an example of such power. All anyone had to do was look at him and the power could be seen – an encounter with the Risen Lord totally changed him. At first, Paul persecuted Christians and then he met Jesus on the road to Damascus and became a living witness of Jesus' resurrection himself. This is what can happen when the power of the Holy Spirit touches us. Amen.