

2014 April 27 (Easter)
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The Seal and Crown of Christian Hope (1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-26)

We turn this morning to the book of 1 Corinthians, the 15th chapter. If you have a Bible with you---perhaps you have it on a device---please activate that. If you have your Bibles with you, please turn there. If neither one of those work for you we also have on the screens before you the text from which I'll be preaching---much of which we actually used as part of our call and response earlier in our worship service.

Paul is going to great lengths in this chapter to deal with---what perhaps may surprise many of us who hear it for the first time---that he was not writing this chapter to a people, a group of people, who didn't believe. In fact, Paul reserves the longest teaching on the resurrection and its implications to a group of Christians, relatively young Christians. And this is early in the church. This is one of the earliest letters in all of the New Testament. None of the gospels yet had been written or passed around to the various churches. But yet, even to this point, as you will see, they still had key doctrines that they believed and taught and shared. Here Paul is then, surprisingly, dealing not with a group of non-Christians, but a group of people who profess faith. And what is he doing? He's bringing them back again to the central truth that the resurrection is the seal and crown of Christian hope. And it is for us.

For one of the things that should serve to wake us up just a little bit is this: that if this can happen to a group of people early on in the history of the church, who would have been able to actually speak to eyewitnesses to the resurrection, who have already professed belief, received the teaching of the apostle Paul---if they can so easily lay aside the resurrection as centrally important, how much more, then, would it not be tempting for us? For my concern is not just whether or not those who do not yet believe in Christ believe in the validity or the fact of the resurrection, one of my concerns this morning is, do you---if you are a professing Christian---do you believe in the resurrection and its implications for your everyday life. We need to again and again and again come to this central truth, the seal and crown of the Christian hope, the resurrection.

1 Corinthians. I'll begin reading in Chapter 15, verse 1.

Now, brothers, 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, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep, (which in Greek means they have died). Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one who abnormally born. (Where here he's referring to the fact that he was not a part of the original Twelve. But, indeed, Christ appeared to Paul, who was then a persecuting Jew, now transformed by the presence of Christ, a believer. He knows how unusual it is that these words fell out of his mouth, so he uses a phrase that literally means one who is freakish, who did not come about in the normal way. He is one who was abnormally born. So having said that, Paul now turns to the central doctrine of the resurrection. Verse 12.

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised, either. And if Christ has not been

raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those 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.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

This is the word of God. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me. Heavenly Father, God of all grace, you so loved the world that you gave your one and only Son. That Son, our Savior---this day we rejoice that he was not left to the grave, but was raised victorious, in his flesh, over sin and death. O Lord, we pray that you would give us, by your Holy Spirit, together with your Word---will you give us a glimpse of the beauty, the power, and the grace that is ours through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And may that resurrection be to seal and crown of our Christian hope. Help the teacher. In Jesus' name. Amen.

If you are a frequent listener to the radio channel, National Public Radio, the name Frederica Mathewes-Green may be familiar to you. She had been an Anglican Christian for quite a number of years, and she and her husband served in the Anglican church, but he and she would both become Orthodox believers, and they are now serving in a church here in suburban Baltimore. She is a prolific writer and a very good one. A number of years ago she wrote a reflection on Easter, and I offer this to you. She said it's that time again when schoolchildren are coloring pictures of Jesus hanging from a cross, shop owners fill their windows with gaily colored cutouts of the flogging at the pillar. In the malls everyone's humming along with the seasonal hits on the sound system, like "O Sacred Head Now Wounded,"---have you heard the Chipmunks version? (This is tongue-in-cheek, yes. Work with me.) Car dealers are promoting great big, empty, tomb-sized discounts on Toyotas. Yes, it's beginning to look a lot like Easter. Who hasn't been invited to an "In His Steps" party where players move plastic pieces around a board emblazoned with the map of Jesus's last suffering day in Jerusalem. Not me, she says. Somehow we just don't make the same boisterous fun of Holy Week that we do at Christmas. No one plans to have a Holly Jolly Easter. And then she reflects on her childhood, and she says it certainly didn't seem very interesting to me as a child back then. Compared to Christmas, Easter seemed boring. Chocolate bunnies? Good. Long blah blah blah sermons at church? Bad. A lot of wordy, grown-up buildup leading to, it seemed, no payoff. You could always count on Christmas to change a lot of stuff, especially in the toy box. Easter, it seemed, didn't change anything.

What does Easter change for you? Why does Easter, seemingly, not get all the attention? Is it because it just seems for grownups? Is Easter not for children? Or have we tried to make that just about eggs and bunnies, which is all well and good. I understand. But what is its place? And why does it often seem that the resurrection---and I've said this before--- why does the resurrection seem to get a lot less real estate in our worship services and our sermons. That wasn't the case for Paul. It got a lot of real estate. And it deserves a lot of real estate in our hearts and minds this morning. So as we look at this, we're going to essentially ask, then, does the resurrection change anything? Is it really the seal and crown of the Christian hope? Paul says it is. So in doing this, I'm going to pick up on Frederica Mathewes-Green's piece a little later, so we'll come back to what she thinks.

Let's look together at this passage, and what we will see is, indeed, Paul gives to his church *first things first*. Secondly, he has to *deal with denial*. Thirdly, the *hope of the resurrection*. First things first, dealing with denial, and the hope of the resurrection.

First things first. In verses 1 through 2, in fact verses 1 through 8, he really gets to the foundation, the central things that he wants to draw their attention to. He first says in verses 1 and 2 that he wants to remind them of something. What he reminds them of is that the gospel, which has been preached to them, which he has preached, which they have received, has done two things for them. It's given them a foundation on which to stand, first. Secondly, it says this gospel is the same gospel through which they were saved. So he's saying to them everything that I'm getting ready to say to you is not of passing importance or abstract or just religious, theological talk. It is the very lifeblood of the Christian. And he says, indeed, don't you remember the gospel I preached to you, which you received, and on which you have taken your stand. When he uses that phrase, it isn't just a ?? stance, it's taking a real firm grip, a place to stand to guard against. He says this gospel is your foundation.

And he says, then, that "by this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise you have believed in vain." It means this. That if someone believes any other gospels, there is no salvation. Any gospel which denies the resurrection, any gospel which does not draw you to the Good Friday reality of a suffering Savior, on a cross, who took our sins upon himself---any other gospel that does not draw our attention to that death and this resurrection is no gospel. So hold on to it. It is what saved you, he says.

He uses the passive voice. This is important for the Corinthians because they believed so much of their value was from their activity: the activity of their minds, the activity of their gifts, the activity of the way in which they worshiped. And because of that pride that he deals with from the very earliest verses of 1 Corinthians and in 2 Corinthians---that pride has led to all kinds of factions, divisions, backbiting---all kinds of problems. And this is the church! By the way, if you are not a believer, let me just challenge you and suggest this: Why in the world would the Bible ever have a letter like this, unless it were true? It's utterly embarrassing. These are the people who should get it! And Paul is saying guess what...you're being tempted by another gospel. And so he's drawing their attention to these first things first. Remember.

And then he unpacks for them the complete gospel in verses 3 through 8. He does it in a very short, concise fashion. And he does it, not with his words alone. Indeed, many interpreters and studiers and researchers realize that what Paul says here---some of the words are very native to way that Paul speaks. He uses these phrases in other places of his letters in Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, or Colossians. But there are other phrases in these few verses that are not original to him. Why? Because even at this stage the church had already begun to use a small creed to profess what they believed, to summarize it in a concise fashion.

This is important because, quite frankly, the Corinthians didn't like Paul very much. I don't know if you know that about the Corinthians. They didn't like Paul very much, because...do you know why? Because he talked about weakness. They wanted to hear about strength. He talked about weakness. He said do you want to know the strength of Christ? Do you want to know the glory of the cross? Then you will only know it through your weakness. And then he pointed to himself. This is something that would be the center of Paul's ministry, and they didn't like it very much. They wanted to hear about victory and triumph. Paul says that's all well and good, but you can't know the triumph unless you know the triumph through the weakness. Paul knows this.

So he says to them, so they understand this is not his gospel, he says, "for what I received I passed on to you as of first importance" and he unpacks it. 1. That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. 2. That he was buried and he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. 3. That he appeared to Peter and then to the Twelve. After that to the brothers, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. And then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me. Death, atonement for sin, burial of his actual, physical body. And

on the third day he rose again---that body which was in the grave, that corpse, is no longer dead—he is alive. And when he came alive, he appeared. And guess what, you can go talk to those people, he says. This is the complete gospel.

It's important for us, because for Paul it centers around those very two, quick, key things. Christ died. And then he uses this phrase: according to the Scriptures. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. What Scriptures is he referring to? He wasn't referring to the New Testament which we can flip through this morning. He wasn't referring to the gospels. He was referring to that which---perhaps many Christians aren't aware of this, and if you're not a Christian perhaps you haven't heard this---the gospel which has just been said, that Christ would die for sins and be raised from the grave, is not a New Testament idea. It is a very old, thousands of years old, biblical doctrine and teaching. In fact, it comes from Isaiah, Chapter 53. Listen to what Isaiah, an Old Testament prophet said regarding this one who would come. "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." He laid our sin on Christ. And then he says, "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. As a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer. And though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days."

What those Scriptures teach is what would come to fulfillment in Jesus Christ, to which Paul is now preaching. And it is this central truth. What is sin? Sin is not an abstract, or, if you will, an 'alone action of the human being.' Don't do it, and so therefore you do it. You've broken the law. That's not what sin is in its very nature. For sin existed well before the Ten Commandments ever were written. Sin, at its very basis, is in the blood of every human being. It is a part of who we are. And that sin, summarized quickly, is essentially saying, God, I do not want you as God. I want to be God. I want to go my own way. Which is why Isaiah would say every human heart says in various ways, either in thoughts or actions, but in our very nature---each of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way. We simply did not want God.

So what happens when we see disobedience? As parents---some of you here this morning are parents. You know when you've asked your child to do something---now of course I'm only talking about the young kids, not all the ones who are visiting, right? We're not going to remember that---so if you're a parent, you know. You've asked your child to do something. Maybe you've asked them to do it once, right? Only once, right? Or twice. Three times. Five, four, three---okay, fifth time! So you've done this. So what happens? You go and you talk to them, and you ask them have you done this thing, and they say no. And you just say, oh, that's okay. If you are like me, have you not erupted when you've seen disobedience, when you've said how many times do I have to tell you?!? Right? Have you never done that? I've totally done that. Right? Maybe you've used more flowery words, I don't know. Okay, that's what we feel as human beings. Why? Because we wanted something done. We had a will, and that will is we wanted someone to follow what we had expected of them. We had given them, if you will---we told them what we wanted them to do, and they didn't do it. And so the human reaction, at its heart, is anger.

But somehow people get all sensitive when we start talking about a God who is angry. We are all his children. Each of us like sheep have gone astray. *But God can't get angry.* Really? Indeed, the Bible tells us the exact opposite. God is the only one who can get angry, because God is without sin. Let me say to you, the reality of sin should exact nothing else from God except---in the biggest letters we could ever write it---WRATH. Yes, I said it on Easter Sunday morning. But folks, we cannot expect God, who is holy and righteous, not to do something about sin.

But here's the beauty of the gospel. As big as his wrath is, as pointed, as particular, as pure, as righteous is God's wrath---his love is greater still. But the beauty of the gospel is this. The wrath doesn't exist outside of the love. The love cannot exist outside of the wrath. How is that so? Jesus Christ. Because God did not change his standards as he looked at us as human beings. Rather he sent his perfect standard, his Son Jesus Christ. And as we heard sung this morning, for God so loved, and Christ came in the flesh to take up our bodies. And he went to the tree, though there were people mocking him, though there were people who lacerated his back, the truth is, the one who was behind that suffering was God, the Father of Jesus Christ, who said I will pour out my wrath on him, because I so love the world. God's standards did not change, but rather on that Good Friday the wrath of God was satisfied. The payment for sin, the debt that we owe to God---paid in full.

But it gets better. That when Paul says not only did Christ die for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, that God so loved the world that he sent his Son---but God so loved the Son that he raised him to life, do you see. Isaiah 53 tells us this so beautifully when he says after the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied. By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. So God allowed his Son to go to the grave for us, but would allow the light of life to come again. This is the complete gospel. This is that which cannot be reduced or removed. We can't have one part and not have any other.

But here's the beauty. God has given to us all that we need and invites us to participate in that gospel. And as surely as Christ's death for our salvation can be had, so can Christ's resurrection from the dead be ours, and we can live forever. As Isaiah would say, we can be among the children of God, that Christ was the first to go before us. It is his death that dealt with sin, but it is his resurrection, Paul says in Romans, that justifies. It makes us right with God.

But while that is the case, there were still those in the early church who had begun to deny the resurrection. So Paul turns to deal with their denial. But it wasn't the fact that there was one part of the church that was denying this, it was the fact that Paul wasn't dealing with a faction, he was dealing with an infection of the church. There were even those who were now denying and affecting others to not believe the resurrection. You see, belief in resurrection was not common. It was not widely believed. Among the Jewish leaders, one group was the Pharisees, and they believed in resurrection. The other group of Jewish leaders, the Sadducees, denied the resurrection. In the Greco-Roman world there was no belief in resurrection. Because resurrection, according to the Scriptures, is that a body dies---a corpse---is then laid in the grave, and then life comes back to that corpse. The Greco-Roman world, no matter what writers are writing today---and they've been writing ever since---no Greco-Roman god or teacher taught that a dead corpse comes back to life. In fact, it was called a lie. So the Christians were not copying other people during that time, and just coming up with their own little resurrection story. It was unique. It was specific. And it was about one person, Jesus Christ.

Some Jews believed in resurrection, but they thought it was going to be at the end of history when God would come again and make Israel great again. But here Jesus comes in the middle of history. This was the problem. So he says to them, you need to understand the centrality of the resurrection. Verses 12 through 14, he asks them (verse 12) a rhetorical question. He says, "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" He's referring back to verse 1. If this is the gospel that saves you, and the gospel teaches that Christ was raised the dead, how can you lay it aside? What is Paul saying? He simply says in

verse 13, "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised." Paul is saying no resurrection, no Christianity. We might as well stay home, have our coffee or tea, read the Washington Post, and give money to the Red Cross or whatever nonprofit we choose. This morning would be a complete waste of our time.

This is precisely what Frederica Mathewes-Green was getting to when she remembered and she says did Easter change anything? Then one Christmas she received a letter, a Christmas card, from an agnostic Jewish friend, a colleague of hers. She records what he wrote to her. This is what he said. Looking at the Christmas thing as a man raised in a Jewish home, the big celebration in Christianity should be Easter. No Easter, no Christianity. So all the focus on Christmas, at least to me, seems misdirected. Why Christians don't whoop it up more at Easter is a mystery to me. How inspirational! How joyful! That is the time to toast each other, lay on gifts, attend worship services, pack in the rich food. Something really substantial and holy is to be remembered. And that was written by a Jew who was an agnostic. Mathewes-Green summarizes: no Easter, no Christianity. My friend Mitch has a point. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, who cares whether he was born in a manger or a 7-11. If he didn't rise from the dead, Christmas is meaningless, too.

That is precisely what Paul is saying. If you give up the centrality of the resurrection, then you don't have the gospel. You are not saved; you are left in your sins.

But the consequences, he says, in verses 14 through 19, are this: then therefore his preaching is completely useless. The faith will be rendered a joke. We will be considered fools among the living, if all this stuff and all of this is simply for a religious or psychological crutch. We will be considered nothing but fools if the resurrection is not true. But he says there is yet a worse consequence. That if we preach that Christ, who is the Son of God, was raised from the dead, and he was not---then that makes us out to be liars. And Deuteronomy 18 says that those who say they speak in the name of God, but say that which is untrue ought to be killed immediately. He was a Jew, now converted to Christ, who recognizes that what he teaches should not be taught frivolously. And he says all of those who are friends and loved ones who have died believing in Christ, they are lost forever if the resurrection is not true.

So I say to you who are Christians---Yes, it's true that Christmas sometimes gets really weighed down by a lot of stuff that has nothing to do with the birth of Christ, but why don't we begin really thinking about Easter beyond Easter Sunday morning. Let us think about every Sunday: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Why don't we also not just talk about how the death of Christ is a means for our salvation, to be reconciled to God---but let us also begin encouraging one another to talk about how the resurrection tells us that the sin that so easily entangles us can be defeated through the power of the resurrection of Christ. How can we begin thinking about singing the hymns of resurrection beyond just Easter-time. And I know that is also on me. I, too, know that I need to enrich my understanding, my application of the resurrection truths. But I want to encourage you this morning, if you are a Christian, to expand your horizons of the beauty and the power of the resurrection, because without it....this is a waste.

But Paul says, indeed, the resurrection is our hope, when he says, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." This hope of the resurrection, Paul tells us right there, it's the seal, meaning it's a guarantee. It's like a down payment on a mortgage. You pay a down payment to a mortgage company, because you know that down payment shows that you are going to be faithful in paying off the mortgage as you are contracted to. What Paul uses is an Old Testament imagery of firstfruits, that of the harvest time. That when you receive the firstfruits of a harvest, that would determine what kind of harvest you are going to have. And then you were to take those firstfruits, and you were to offer them to the Lord as a sacrificial offering. While he doesn't use it in that sense, he's talking about this: that Christ being raised from the

dead is the firstfruits of a mighty harvest. Looking at the power of Christ in his resurrection and his resurrection glory tells us what kind of harvest God is about.

We've perhaps sung the hymn, *I Come, Just as I Am*. Well guess what, the resurrection tells us this. We might sing *Just as I am, I come to you*, but the resurrection tells us that God will never leave us just as we are. He means to make us a new people, and the seal of that is that God brought from death to life the corpse of Christ, and now he is reigning, glorious, with the Father at the right hand of God, and he will reign until the last enemy, Paul says here----the last enemy, which is death, is overthrown. You see, there's the crown. The seal of our resurrection, the seal of the harvest of God and of his grace is Christ's resurrection. But there is also that which Christ is the crown.

He is the King, and he will remain reigning. He tells us---verse 24. "Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." You know what that's describing? That's describing us right now. Death is still present. Sin and its effects are still working. It affects our interpersonal relationships when we hurt one another, when we sin against one another. We see it in our world. We see it politically. We see it culturally. We see it affecting all kinds of problems in our world where people aren't paying attention---the ship driver of the ferry in South Korea, or whatever did or didn't take place in the cockpit of Malaysia flight 370, and all of the devastation. Ladies and gentlemen, if we need anything, it's to simply look at the nose in front of us and to see the world around us and see that sin is still very present.

But the crown of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, tells us this. That a day is coming when everything will be made right. All evil will be judged and all evil will be undone. But how do we know that? How do we experience that? Perhaps you're experiencing a particular sin this morning that you feel---if you're a Christian---you feel oppresses you, and you seemingly can't get rid of it. You feel as though you've had defeat over it, but it just keeps coming back and you feel defeated. You are tempted to believe that the resurrection is just a story we told way back then, and it's just kind of a nice story, but it has no practical application for you now. How do we apply this?

I believe it's this way. And I'm thankful for Alister McGrath, pastor, teacher, theologian, when he used this illustration to help me understand exactly where we stand and how to apply the fact that Christ is reigning now---sin is still present and death is still here, but he's coming again. And it's this. He met with a former Japanese prisoner of war as he was still living, telling of his fighting during World War II, being held in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in Singapore. McGrath writes this. 'He told me of the astonishing change that came into the camp atmosphere when one of the prisoners who owned a shortwave radio learned of the collapse of the Japanese war effort in the middle of 1945. Although all of the camp still remained prisoners, and would for some time, they knew that their enemy had been beaten. It would only be a matter of time before they were released. Those prisoners, I was told, began to laugh and cry as if they were free already.' He then continued to speak from his own experience of his relatives and friends. He says, 'The end of the second world war in Europe came about a year after the establishment of the bridgeheads in Normandy in June of 1944. But an objective change had taken place sometime before the theater of war, with a resulting subjective change in the hearts and minds of captive people. And so now with us. In one sense victory has not come. Death is still here. Sin is still present. Yet in another sense this victory has come. The resurrection declares in advance of the event of God's total victory over all evil and oppressive forces such as death, evil, and sin---their backbone has been broken. And we may begin now to live in the light of that victory, knowing that the long night of their oppression will end.'

Ladies and gentlemen, if you this morning feel the weight of sin, you need to know that the resurrection power of Christ and the cross of our Christ have broken the back of its power. For the power of sin is death. Where, O death, is your sting? It has been swallowed up in the victory, the

resurrection of Jesus Christ. And you, dear Christian, can say in the name of Christ, the words of Scripture, that sin no longer leads to death. No longer do you stand condemned. If you are a believer in Christ, indeed, there is now no longer condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. While sin may be present and death may still follow us like a ghost and a stench, a new day is coming, just as surely as this spring day. The warmth of summer is starting to blow in. The flowers have begun to bloom. But not all of the leaves are on the tree. Not all the grass is yet green. But the Lamb who was slain is coming again, and when he does, victory will be ours for those who are in Christ.

But if you are not a Christian this morning, I simply ask you to decide---with all of your intellectual capacity and with all of your will---is not the death and resurrection of Christ worthy of your investigation? It is. Because what he offers you this morning is not his wrath. This morning he offers you his love and an invitation to know victory over sin and death which holds us captive---but which the backbone has been broken through Christ alone. If you do not know him, please talk with someone who does. Please come after the service; ask me, ask Pastor Flora. We would love to talk to you about Christ and the promises that are yours in him.

But today, today is the day of resurrection and a day of grace. Drink of it, all of you. Come to know him, for he is our Savior. Let's pray. Father, for the Christian this morning who feels weighed down because of the presence of sin, for those who are discouraged by the reality of death, Lord, I pray that the resurrection power of your grace would flood their souls, and that Christ and all of his resurrection glory would be so set on their minds and hearts that they would desire to know you. For those Christians, Lord, who feel captive to sin, Lord, remind them of the backbreaking power of the cross and resurrection. May they know victory where now they feel as if they only can taste defeat. For those who do not yet know Christ, Lord, I can only imagine the arguments they might be slinging at me. But Lord, I would pray, by your Spirit love them to the end. May they know your love that will not let them go. For Christ and his glory, who has died, who has risen, and who will come again. In his name we pray. Amen.