

Epiphany 7 / February 23, 2025

1 Corinthians 15:21

*“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”*

As in Adam all die. In Christ all are made alive

St. Paul begins his first letter to the Corinthians addressing divisions in the church. The source of division was twofold, pride of association and pride of possessions. People took special pride in the person who had baptized them, as if that gave them a special spiritual pedigree above others. The power of baptism is not in the person who baptizes. The power is the word of God and the working of the Holy Spirit who baptizes us into the death and resurrection of Jesus, makes our hearts His home, raises us to spiritual life, empowers us to walk in newness of life and give us the promise of rising to eternal life.

People took pride in the particular gifts the Holy Spirit had given them, as if that put them on a higher spiritual plane and made them closer to God. Paul reminded them that there is no reason to take pride in something we have been given. We can be proud of something we have earned. We are thankful for gifts we have received. The Spirit gifts us that we may serve one another. The greatest and most important gift is faith in Christ our Saviour. We share this gift in common with all who believe. The gift of faith puts us all on the same spiritual level as children of God, adopted not because of anything worthy in us, or because of anything we have done to earn it, but for the sake of Jesus who sacrificed Himself for our sins.

Paul wrote about the three greatest gifts; faith, hope and love concluding that love is the greatest, for it informs all the other gifts of the Spirit and is the gift that never ends. Faith will pass into sight, hope will be fulfilled, but the love of God which we receive and experience in Christ Jesus will never end. Faith will pass into sight. Hope will be fulfilled. Love never ends for we will share in and experience the love of God fully and eternally in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Which brings us to the conclusion of his letter, in which Paul speaks about the centrality of the resurrection to the Christian faith and its importance in our lives. The resurrection is not an appendix to the Christian faith. It is the heart and centre. Jesus' resurrection proves He is the eternally begotten Son of God, that His words are truth and life, that the Father accepted His sacrifice to atone for our sins and that He brings us to the Father, now through faith, finally and fully by giving us a share in His resurrection. All die because of Adam's sin. Jesus died for the sins of all. Because Jesus rose, all who belong to Him will rise with Him.

Among the many unique revelations of the bible is the connection between sin and death. The religions of the ancient near east in which God gave birth to His people, did not connect sin with death, except as punishment for a serious crime. Death was simply assumed to be part of life. In the world today, death is assumed to be part of life. The world of science makes no connection between sin and death. Biologists search for a cellular cause of death, a reason why healthy cells begin to reproduce unhealthy, diseased and malignant cells. They ask 'Can the degeneration of our bodies be written out of our genetic code?' If cell growth can be maintained at a certain point, perhaps people can live indefinitely barring traumatic injury, and remain forever young. But probably not, because death seems to be woven into the very fabric of life, as two forces locked in an eternal struggle. In the ancient world, sin was simply something that made the gods and other people angry. It was only the cause of death if you made the wrong person angry. In the world today, sin is not acknowledged as having any relevance to our biological structure, certainly not as the cause of death.

In the bible at the very beginning, sin is shown to be the root and cause of death. God warned the man and the woman not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and of evil, for in the day they ate of it they would most certainly die. Not because it was bad fruit, but because their disobedience would break their relationship with Him in whom they had their being. When they ate, they died; first in relationship with God and each other. Eventually in their bodies as sin infected their cells and rewrote their DNA. God said to Adam, *"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you...By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground...for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."* As Paul said, sin came into the world through one man and through him to all people. Death comes to all, because all are conceived and born into a world broken in relationship to God through sin.

The connection between sin and death is essential for understanding Jesus, His purpose for coming into the world, His dying and His rising. Jesus did not come to show us how to live good lives. God has already done that through the human conscience and in His holy word. The law is written on the human heart and on tablets of stone. The Lord said to the prophet Micah, *"He has told you O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."* Jesus' purpose in coming into the world was to heal the broken relationship between humans and God caused by human sin.

Jesus accomplished this and fulfilled His purpose by living a life without sin, by offering Himself into death for the atonement of human sin and by rising for the forgiveness and eternal salvation of all who believe in His name. Jesus is the greatest teacher. In our gospel He teaches us to love our enemies and to pray for those who hate us. Hate begets hate, but love triumphs in forgiveness. God is love and that is how God seeks to treat us. But the greatest and most essential teaching Jesus gives is that He is our Saviour from sin and death and that in Him and in Him alone, we have forgiveness in time and life in eternity.

In Adam all die, in Christ all will be made alive who belong to Him. We need to belong to Him! St. Paul says, *“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”* Then he adds *“Christ the first-fruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ.”* Christ suffered for the sins of every human soul. He atoned for the sins of the whole world. He offers forgiveness and life for all to receive, but we have to believe it to receive it! Jesus offers Himself to everyone as their God and Saviour through the hearing of the gospel. Jesus was the greatest teacher of the law, as the Son of God He could see into the human heart. He was and is an even greater teacher of the gospel. He fulfilled the law in our place. He offered Himself for our forgiveness. He calls us to Himself through the gospel. He seals His promise of forgiveness and eternal life in our baptism into His death and resurrection. He calls to faith saying, *“Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will you rest.”* We rest in His peace when we believe in Him as our God and Saviour. We rest in His peace knowing that at His return He will call us to share in His resurrection to a new and eternal life, in which Adam’s sin, the world’s sin and our sin are forever gone!

We rest in His peace by coming to Him with our prayers, coming to Him in worship and in our fellowship as a congregation. In gathering together, we experience the resurrected Christ in a special way. In worship He speaks to us again the promise of forgiveness in the remembrance of our baptism. He feeds our faith and nourishes our spirits as we gather to eat His body and drink His blood, under the forms of bread and wine. We rest in His peace by remembering of first importance that Jesus died for our sins according to the scriptures that He was raised on the third day for our salvation and that in Him we are promised a share in His victory over death and a portion in His resurrection to life everlasting. In Adam all die, all who are in Christ shall be made alive in time and for eternity. God bless us always with faith to believe and with hearts that yearn for His salvation. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

