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by Pat Marrin

[View Author Profile](#)
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

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"If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all" (1 Corinthians 15:19).

1 Corinthians 15:12-20; Luke 8:1-3

Paul makes the resurrection the linchpin of his preaching in his letter to the Corinthians. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, the Gospel he preached is meaningless and all those who believe in him are deluded and without hope of life after death.

The hope for life after death is one of the oldest signs of religion in human history. The earliest evidence of human burial dates back to 300,000 BC, sites containing useful items to accompany the dead in whatever realm followed. Funeral rites throughout the ancient world project belief in an afterlife, and ancient tales of ghostly visitors from the beyond the grave affirm this hope without evidence.

Christianity offered a bold assertion that the crucified Jesus had returned from the dead and had appeared to many of his followers. The basis for the life of the church after Pentecost was that the risen Christ was alive and active in its members. Christ's resurrection was victory over death, and all the baptized were promised a share in his new life, here in this world and in the next. For members of the Corinthian church to say that there was no resurrection, struck at the very foundation of the faith.

Paul affirms that faith in words so direct that he wanted them to know their implications for everything he had preached and they had once believed: "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all" (1 Cor 15:19). As disciples of Jesus, we must be Easter people. Our faith rests on a spirituality that unites us with the death of Jesus so we might also share in his resurrection. Take that away and we stand at the gravesites for our beloved dead without hope for them and for ourselves. The fact of death confronts us, but faith in resurrection points us forward to the mystery of life with God as the purpose of our human journey.

It is interesting that today's Gospel affirms the women who followed Jesus. Without their witness, where would we be regarding the resurrection? While the men disciples fled in fear and persisted in doubt, the women accompanied Jesus to the cross and were the first to affirm that he had been raised from the dead.

At a moment in our world when so many have died difficult and needless deaths because of the pandemic, our faith is tested even more. How we face these tragedies requires an even deeper faith that God accompanies every life to the end and opens the way to the New Creation Jesus made possible by his death. With this hope we comfort one another.

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