Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“We shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

1 Thes 4:13-18; Luke 14:16-30

Resurrection is the real test of faith every believer faces and every pastor confronts when consoling a spouse, children and family when a loved one has died. The fact of death has all the cards, the lifeless body in the hospital bed, the corpse in the casket, the box of ashes from the funeral home. Beyond our own self-assurances about love being stronger than death, heaven as a place where reunion will occur, the one thing that stands between us and total loss is whether Jesus is who he said he was and his own transformation from the cross and the tomb to new life is true.

Paul was confronted in Thessalonica by believers awaiting the Second Coming but also facing the deaths of some of their members. Paul affirms that those who have “fallen asleep” will survive death because Jesus has defeated death. He is the linchpin of all their hopes.

Paul addressed the issue directly in his First Letter to the Corinthians: “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor. 15:14-19).

Today’s Gospel from Luke gives us a window into Jesus’s understanding of who he is. “The Spirit of the Lord” is upon him as he begins his ministry of preaching the Good News of liberation, sight, an end to oppression and a time of jubilee. He applies one of Isaiah’s explicit messianic texts to himself in the synagogue where he grew up, as bold an assertion of identity as possible. His subsequent rejection by his own family and neighbors sets the pattern of preparing himself for his suffering and eventual death in Jerusalem. The world is not ready for Good News that will demand radical conversion. But Jesus has already received his mission and been tested in the wilderness. He is God’s beloved Son, and everything he is saying will come true.

It is the way Jesus lived that led to his death. His resurrection was God’s response to his total obedience. The early church emerged from a crisis of despair to realize that the Law and the Prophets converge on Jesus and reveal God’s plan for the transformation of Creation. Jesus is the firstborn of the dead, the pioneer of our salvation, the assurance that if we live as he did, we will rise with him. To believe this is to know that our beloved dead are among the living, cheering us on to the joy they now possess in God. If physical death has all the cards, glory still has the winning hand that holds us safe in Christ.

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