

Rev. Dan Welch Epiphany 6 2-13-22

Text- 1 Corinthians 15: 12- 20 “The Resurrection Connection”

I think it's fair to say that most children love to play “connect-the-dots.” If you go to a restaurant and ask for a children's menu, there is almost bound to be a “connect-the-dots” game somewhere on that paper placemat. In fact, there are whole books of connect-the-dot puzzles for kids to enjoy, as well. What makes “connect the dots” so interesting is the way in which the picture or pattern *progresses*. As you connect the numbers or letters together with lines, one by one, gradually, a picture begins to leap out at you. And all from what started as a bunch of random-looking marks on a page.

But kids aren't the only ones who get to “connect-the-dots.” Life itself is a lot like a “connect-the-dots” puzzle. It's progressive. One thing in life leads to another. Connect the dots: You start out as a baby, then you progress to being a toddler, and then before too long it's time to head off for your first day of kindergarten. From there you keep on going-progressing - to first grade, to second grade, and all the way up to 12<sup>th</sup>. Then maybe it's on to more schooling, then a career, perhaps marriage and a family, and finally retirement. Looking back at the big picture of life, no matter what point you're at currently, you can see the dots that have been connected and you see how the picture of *your* life takes on a broad, full look that you could never have imagined earlier on. And it all came into place in God's good timing and in the order in which He planned it.

Connecting the dots also relates well to how we come to understand God's plan of salvation for us. Today, in our Epistle reading, the apostle Paul teaches that our Christian faith is not a random, hodgepodge bunch of beliefs. Rather, there is real progression to what we believe and confess about our faith. As we grow in that faith and understanding of our Savior, Jesus, an astounding picture emerges, it leaps out at us. It leads us to realize what great hope we have for this world and the next. And this is most beneficial and most comforting during times when life feels out of control and hopeless. And so, Paul's words today give us this hope, as he

explains to us: “The Resurrection Connection.” This morning we’ll see how St. Paul connects the dots between Christ’s life and ours.

The first point is this: If Christ didn’t rise from the dead, then we can’t either.

Logic and reason. Those are two of the things that the people living in the city of Corinth *craved*. In fact, they lived in a culture that prided itself on philosophical reason. Greek philosophy had a powerful grip on the members of this ancient church. Philosophers like Plato taught what’s known as a dualistic view of nature. What’s a dualistic view of nature? It’s the insistence that everything “spiritual” is good and everything “physical” is bad.

Such a point-of-view considered the notion of a resurrected body to be foolish and ugly. Because it gave the impression that the physical body could be glorified and put on an equal level with the soul. Remember to the Greeks anything “spiritual” is good and anything “physical” is bad. And so, some Christians in Corinth were promoting the idea that there is no physical resurrection of the dead.

Sadly, this kind of thinking hasn’t died out. It’s been “resurrected”, so to speak (!). This false idea of no resurrection has been resurrected over the centuries again and again. Many theologians nowadays in our post-modern era believe and teach that Christ’s physical resurrection did not actually happen. Some preachers will refer to the resurrection as “the Easter event.” And what they mean is that Jesus didn’t actually rise, but that doesn’t matter. What’s important, they say, is that people somehow, mystically, share in Christ’s existential death and resurrection. In other words, those who deny the resurrection account claim that Easter is just a story that fills us with the hope that we can rise above our troubles in life, whatever they may be. We rise with Christ in the sense that we find the freedom to be true to ourselves, and to live a life that is open to God’s love. This kind of thinking tries to erase the bold pencil line of hope that connects us to Jesus Christ.

But what does St. Paul have to say in response to this? He boldly and unequivocally says, “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.” If people cannot be raised from the dead, then Jesus couldn’t have been raised either. Do you see how Paul connects the dots for us? If Christ didn’t rise, then people who believe in Him have a fruitless, empty faith and worst of all they are hopelessly lost in sins.

The resurrection is God’s ultimate pledge and promise of His grace- His undeserved love. And that flies in the face of self-serving hearts. By nature, our sinful hearts don’t desire a resurrected Savior because that’s the ultimate proof that Christ has achieved salvation for us. Sinful humans don’t want a God Who offers the free gift of salvation wrapped up in His Son. No, by nature our hearts want a self-help manual to follow in order to get into heaven. And sadly, that’s what some people mistakenly think the Bible’s all about.

Without a resurrection, Christianity is pointless. Without a resurrection, we’re just wasting our time here this morning. We might as well be out ice-fishing, snowmobiling, or sleeping in and resting up to watching the big game this evening. Without a resurrection there can be no hope for us. There can be no hope of Justification- God’s powerful and sweet pronouncement that we are declared innocent of the guilt and power of all our sins for Jesus’ sake. Without Christ’s resurrection there is no need for us to try to live a life of joyful obedience to the 10 commandments. We might as well indulge every sinful desire that comes our way or crosses our mind. Without the resurrection, we might as well live it up now because if Christ’s remains are still lying in some shallow grave in Palestine, then as St. Paul says: “We are to be pitied more than all people. “

To deny the resurrection is an extremely dangerous thing. It leads to spiritual erosion. The line of hope that connects us to Christ will be erased. If Christ hasn’t been raised, then we won’t be either. If Christ is still dead, then God has lied to us and the Bible cannot be trusted!

What’s more, to deny the resurrection means that all of our loved ones who died in the faith will remain dead. There is no hope *if* there is no resurrection of the dead.

“But,” thanks be to God, “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep,” That’s how Paul

announces it in our text. Because Christ has truly risen from the dead, we who trust in Him, will truly share in His resurrection. That's the second point in our resurrection connection: Since Christ rose from the dead, we will rise also!

Talk about a real sense of hope! Jesus' resurrection gives us the absolute assurance that our sins are forgiven, and eternal life is ours. After His death for us on the cross, Jesus did not stay dead. He rose! He lives and He abides with us in this life just as He promised! Eternal salvation is our destiny. One day, at His command, we will spring forth from the grave and join with our risen Savior in the glories of heaven.

If you think about it, of all the special days in the Christian Church Year, Easter, the Day of Resurrection, has the greatest meaning and the greatest influence. Our regular worship day is Sunday, the day of the week on which Jesus rose from the dead. You could say every Sunday is a "little Easter." We not only worship on Sunday because it was the day of Jesus' resurrection, but also because Jesus' resurrection is our greatest hope, and it holds the deepest implication for our faith and for our lives.

Today, St. Paul has helped us to see that the dots have been connected for us. There is a resurrection connection. The power of Christ's Easter fills us with the strength to live each day of our lives with the hope of the resurrection to come on the Last Day. What joy we have every day because of the resurrection connection! Amen!