

Six Gifts of the Resurrection

Although we do not know from where we are today whether or not the Flames will win the Stanley Cup, if they do, this city will erupt in a celebration the likes of which we have not seen for many years. We are focused on hockey this year in such a way that even people who do not usually follow the playoffs are being drawn in.

Yes there is anticipation in the air this year that just maybe the cup will be ours!

Paul in concluding the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians is also anticipating a victory. This opponent is tougher than San Jose, Philadelphia or Tampa Bay. This opponent hits hard and wants to win. But says St. Paul the cup won't belong to Captain Death and those who play with him. No sir! Thanks be to God that the victory will be won by Captain Jesus and those siding with him.

Just as we see and hear the words "Go Flames Go" everywhere, right here in 1 Corinthians 15 there is another victory shout. Look at verse 57: "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul is saying that as Christians we know who has the ultimate victory. It is Jesus Christ and we will share in the victory with him. It will be a victory celebration that in order of magnitude is far greater than anything we will experience if the Flames win the Cup.

Right now the Flames are focused because they are in pursuit of Lord Stanley's Cup. All that they do has that end in mind. If that longing is fulfilled the team, and we the citizen's of Calgary, will be satisfied.

As we continue to live out our lives through faith in Jesus Christ we discover that the more satisfied we are in him the more fully he will be glorified in us. To glorify God means to live lives that are focused on Him and his purposes. At the end of this chapter Paul describes such a life when he writes: "Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

The Resurrection of Jesus satisfies six of the deepest longings that are rooted in every human heart. As Jesus meets these longings in us we will be satisfied in Him and he

will be glorified in us. St. Paul knew this satisfaction and was thus able to live a focused life.

These six longings are found in verses 14-19 of chapter 15.

If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ-whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised.¹⁷ If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.¹⁸ Then those also who have died in Christ have perished.¹⁹ If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

I want to first state these six longings in the negative.

1. Verse 14: “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain.” But since Christ has been raised, our preaching is not in vain.

2. Verse 14: “. . . and your faith is in vain.” But since Christ has been raised, our faith is not in vain.

3. Verse 15: If Christ has not been raised, “we are found to be misrepresenting God [literally: we are false witnesses], because we testified of God that he raised Christ.” But since Christ has been raised, we are not false witnesses about the work of God.

4. Verse 17: “If Christ has not been raised then your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” But since Christ has been raised, we are not still in our sins.

5. Verse 18: If Christ has not been raised, then “those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.” But since Christ has been raised, the dead in Christ have not perished.

6. Verse 19: If Christ has not been raised, then “we are of all people most to be pitied.” But since Christ has been raised, we are not to be pitied.

I want to now restate these statements in positive terms. I’m going to switch the order around this time because when the resurrection starts meeting our needs there is a kind of pattern that fits our experience. I want to follow that pattern as we look at each of our longings being satisfied.

1. First, from verse 17, instead of saying negatively that we are not still in our sins, we can say positively that because of the resurrection we are forgiven for our sins.

I put this first as the basic need and longing of our hearts because if God holds our sins against us--and we all have sinned!--then there is no hope of anything else from God. The foundation for every other blessing from God is that God won't hold our sins against us. Everything hangs on forgiveness.

How is the resurrection connected to our forgiveness? Isn't it the death of Jesus that takes away our sin, because he bore our sins and took our judgment (1 Cor. 15:3)? Yes. But the connection with the resurrection is very important. Romans 4:25 puts it like this. "He was handed over (to death) on account of our transgressions, and he was raised on account of our justification."

This means that by his death he paid the penalty for our sins and purchased our acquittal and forgiveness.

Everybody in this room this morning needs forgiveness, and deep inside, even when we don't think about it, we long for it. We long to be accepted by God. We fear the alienation of our guilt. But Paul says, because Christ rose from the dead we are no longer in our sins. This is the first and most basic longing of our hearts.

2. Second, from verse 14, instead of saying negatively that our faith is not in vain, we can say positively that because of the resurrection our faith is well-founded. Or, to put it more personally, because of the resurrection of Jesus there is someone we can trust absolutely.

In the heart of every person is a longing for someone that can be counted on through thick and thin. Someone who is absolutely trustworthy. Someone who, if you put your faith in him, it won't be in vain. He won't let you down. He will always be there. Jesus is that someone

3. Third and building on this second longing is the one found in verse 15. Instead of saying negatively that the apostles are not false witnesses about the work of God, we can say positively that because of the resurrection the apostles preach what is true.

This is an area where I think many of us desire to be more fully converted. We can be

so unsettled by the way people challenge the Bible and because our lives are sometimes characterized by conflict, unanswered questions and prayers we can find it hard to fully believe that God's purposes for his creation are good and that God is good. However the more we are assured that what the apostles teach is true, the more we can believe that God's character and purposes for us are good. When we are more fully converted in this way we can imitate the trust-filled life exhibited by Julian of Norwich.

She lived between the years 1342 and 1416. Bubonic plague, the 'black death', swept through Norwich three times during her life; few, if any, families would have remained unaffected and all would have known great hardship through the loss of many relatives, friends and neighbours. Indeed, if Julian had married (which probably would have been around the age of fifteen) then she could have lost both husband and children.

Whatever her family circumstances, Julian had sufficient education to become the first woman known to have written a book in English, *The Revelations of Divine Love*.

Julian's abundant love for and trust in the Lord gave her much joy, inner peace, gratitude and courage. Her desire to know her Lord more intimately resulted in God showing Julian a spiritual vision of His simple loving. God is our clothing, wrapping us and holding us in His love, which is so tender and will never leave us. Julian understood this to mean that God is everything that is good. This picture then developed into a small object, a hazelnut, in the palm of her hand. It was round as a ball. Asking God what it was, she knew that it represented all that is made". It was so small it could have disappeared; but Julian understood that it would continue always because God loves it, just as everything is loved and has its being by the love of God.

The hazelnut, which represents everything we can see and touch, has three characteristics: God made it, God loves it and God keeps it. God is therefore, Maker, Lover and Keeper of all. Until Julian could be so close to her God that nothing separated them, she knew she couldn't have perfect rest and happiness.

Julian also realised that sin stood in the way of her yearning for God. She reflected on the idea that without sin we would have been pure and like God, and all would have been well. Through many and various scenes Jesus constantly reassured Julian "that all would be well, and all manner of things would be well". This was the message that

was at the core of here life and is really the message that is at the heart of 1 Corinthians 15. “All will be well, and all manner of things would be well.”

Julian exemplifies for us the trusting heart that was converted in such a way that she took God at his word.

When we can affirm that what the apostles preached is true, knowing Jesus can be trusted we can keep on praying, thanking, trusting and rejoicing in God and others knowing that life is not absurd but has a divine purpose.

Fourth and fifth, from verse 19, instead of saying negatively that we are not to be pitied, we can say positively that because of the resurrection our lives are most purposeful. Our preaching is not in vain--it is meaningful, valid, valuable, significant.

If Christ is not raised then living for him, doing what he says, following his will is a great delusion. We should be pitied like insane people who live by hallucinations. But since he has been raised and is alive and reigns as king for ever, all our obedience, all our love, all our self-denial is not just not-to-be-pitied, but is purposeful.

And there is in everyone of us the longing that our lives be well spent--that our lives count for something, that they have significance and usefulness, that we don't come to the end of our days and say, it was all in vain, empty, pointless, useless, insignificant--pitiable.

Paul knows this. That's why he ends this whole chapter on the resurrection (v. 58) with the words: “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

Not in vain! That's the longing of our lives. O Lord let it not be misspent. Let me not come to my grave and say, “I've wasted it!” It does not have to be. Christ is risen and everything done in his name--by his strength and for his glory--is not in vain. It is purposeful. Significant. Valuable. Eternal.

6. Finally, there is the longing that we shall live forever in joy. That we not come to an empty end after a full and valuable life. That we not become a zero, or worse, damned. And so Paul says in verse 18 that because Christ is raised those who have fallen asleep in him--those who have died in faith--have not perished. Or positively,

they are alive. They will live for ever. They live the way Christ lives. They will enter into the joy of their Master.

At verses 53 and 54 Paul restates this wonderful truth with such assurance: “For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54 When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.” And the series will be over and won by Jesus and all those one his team.

Yes, the greatest news in all the world is that God and his Son are most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in them. And to make that true God raised his Son Jesus from the dead to reign for evermore.

In raising him from the dead he meets six of our deepest longings:

1. He gave us forgiveness and glorified Jesus as the all-sufficient forgiver;
2. He gave us a friend to count on and glorified Jesus as utterly reliable;
3. He gave us guidance and unchanging truth and glorified Jesus as the absolute foundation for truth and righteousness;
4. He gave us a life that is not pitiable but purposeful,
5. He gave us a ministry that is not in vain but fruitful, and glorified Jesus as the source and goal of all life and all ministry;
6. And he gave us everlasting joy that will not be ended by death, and glorified Jesus as the author of life, the victor over death and the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

“Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

