

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
The Festival of the Resurrection of our Lord
April 4, 2021
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
Easter changes everything!

—1 Corinthians 15:19-26

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In 1789, Benjamin Franklin wrote in a letter, “Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be *certain*, except death and taxes.” He wasn’t the first one to coin the phrase, but he did make it popular.

There is some truth in what he is saying. As much as we would love to build around us various institutions and systems that promise permanency, none of them are guarantees. There is precious little that can actually be said to be *certain*.

Have you noticed that in your life? Life is so uncertain. A father tells his little girl that he will always be there for her. His promise *seems* so certain, so permanent. But then cancer strikes, and it is very aggressive. He only has a few months to live. His promise is not certain.

A husband kisses his wife in the morning as he is leaving for work. He says, “I promise I’ll be home by 5:00 for dinner. I’ll pick up some groceries on the way home. I’ll see you then.” Little did he know that he would *not* see his wife later because he would become one of the victims in a mass shooting. Life is so uncertain.

Some things are certain. We certainly have some really powerful enemies who are against us. These enemies love to exert their rule, authority, and power. They pin us to the ground. They knock us down. They have a heavy influence in our lives.

What are these enemies? Oh, so many. The arch-enemy is Satan himself. Oh, he smiles when devastation happens in our lives. He loves how we as human beings are bent on self-destruction.

His smirks have been going on since the beginning of time. As he slithered away from Adam and Eve in the Garden, he had a smirk on his face. He put his boot on Adam’s neck, pushed him to the ground, and he just laughed at our fall. Adam had experienced that ruler, authority, and power. He felt it. He experienced it. Satan had him pinned.

But that is not the only enemy. You peek over his shoulder and you see the rule of sin. He is standing there, too. He has his boot on Adam’s neck, pressing him to the ground. Now there was guilt. Shame. Embarrassment. Instead of being completely transparent and open, walking in perfect harmony with God, he cowers in fear. Everything changed. Everything changed.

But peek over the other shoulder. Death and hell also had their way with Adam. Their boots were on his neck, too. Adam saw that enemy exert its power and authority in his life. He saw his son Cain assassinate his son Abel. Right there in cold blood. One moment alive, the next moment dead. Everything changed. Everything changed.

And what was that like for Adam to live for hundreds of years only to see your descendants falling to the dust again and again and again. Can you imagine the questions? “Dad, grandpa, great-great-great-great grandpa, why do we have to die? Why us? Why does this happen? Why is there is so much hatred? So much frustration? So much anger? So much worry? So much fear? So much anxiety? So much death? Why does it have to be like this?”

How often did Adam have to swallow his pride and look down to the ground? What did it feel like to know that YOU were the cause of it all? He looked at his sons and daughters and his family and had to say, “I am the reason all of this happens. Your mother and I brought this into the world when we listened to the lies of Satan rather than the truth of God.”

Everything changed. Everything changed. And nobody could escape. One after the other pinned down into the dust by these powerful rulers and authorities. Everything changed. Everything changed.

But you can be sure that Adam also expressed words of hope. As he sat around the campfire at night keeping warm, he would tell the story of a promise. “It will change. It will all change. God said it would. He promised. Someone from your mother’s offspring is going to make it all better. He will make it right. These powerful enemies that we face in our lives, *he* will pin *them* to the ground. And they will no longer have rule, authority, and power over us. Everything will change. Everything will change.” And those promises are true. Easter changes everything!

Every single enemy that you face in life, Christ took on and he won. He won! Oh, he had to allow himself to be put in the exact same position and situation that every single person has been in. He needed to be placed under the boot of all our enemies. He needed to be sprawled out in the dust pinned to the ground.

Satan, sin, death, hell ... they all had their boots on Jesus' neck. And he allowed it. God the Father who was so pleased with his Son actually changed him from S-O-N to S-I-N. He made Jesus to *be sin* in our place.

And all the enemies smirked. It's done. He's gone. No more hope. Jesus, the Son of God, is dead. It all looked so hopeless and helpless for all of Adam's descendants. Jesus was pinned down, and even the last great enemy, death itself, held its ugly boot on his neck.

But that victory was short lived. The enemies that hound us and hover over us soon found the tables turned on them. As they looked down to the one, they pinned down to the dust lying lifeless, everything changed. Everything changed.

He got up. He sprang to life. And he turned around to face those enemies. Oh. And you should have seen their faces. Terror. Fear. Anger. Frustration. It overwhelmed them as Jesus stood as the victor.

And one by one, he throws them to the ground and pins them under his living foot. The resurrection changes everything.

And all those believers from Adam until the end, all those who looked in faith to the one who would defeat the enemies in our lives, all those believers including you and me, we too will spring to life. It will happen on the great day when our victorious Lord will return to take us home.

And on that day, you and I will experience fully the fact that the resurrection changes everything. No more enemies. No more will Satan plague your life. No more will sin be a nagging handmaid hovering over your head. No more will hell threaten your eternity. No more will death sink its venom in your life. All gone. All gone.

The only one left is Jesus. He is the only one left on the stage of life. And he stands there with you by his side. The resurrection changes everything. It changes everything.

Perfect peace. Perfect harmony. Perfect joy. No more fear. No more guilt. No more pain. No more death. No more uncertainty. The enemies, all of them, are under Christ's boot. They are rendered powerless, inoperable. On the day he returns as the victorious King of all, only God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit shall stand with you and me and all believers in Christ. The apostle Paul says it best. **"For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death"** (1Corinthians 15:21-26). Easter changes everything!

But I would like you to think about something that is quite ridiculous. But let's imagine it for a minute. What if Jesus didn't rise from the dead? What if there was no resurrection? Would that change how you live your life? Oh, it most certainly would.

Why in the world would you come to worship? Why would you refrain from indulging in those sinful activities? Why would you live a disciplined life focused on one who was simply ... dead?

I mean, if Jesus didn't physically, bodily rise from the dead, well, then live your life in pleasure. Why not? Let us eat, drink, and party-hearty. Do whatever feels right to you. Nothing else matters.

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, if there is no resurrection, then spend all your money on yourself. Keep it all. Don't give offerings. Don't support the gospel ministry. Don't build a new ministry center. Don't do any of that. What's the point? If we just live for today and then we die, the only thing that makes any sense is to live for the self-centered pleasures of this life.

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, well then don't be baptized. What's the point? As I look at all my relatives, family members, fellow congregational members who were baptized and then died, as I think back to how they were baptized because they believed that their baptism was their own personal Holy Week event that connected them to Jesus' death and resurrection, if there is no resurrection, then why in the world would we be baptized? It would be worthless. It would be pointless.

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, why in the world would your pastors work hard to present the Word in a way that connects with you? Why would we proclaim this Word, teach this Word? What's the point? Why would any of us face ridicule for standing on the pages of God's truth? Why would we willingly show ourselves to be different from the rest of the world? Not in an arrogant, I'm-better-than-you way, but in a way that shows we believe there is something greater in store for us after this life. Why would we do that ... if there was no resurrection?

Why do we struggle? Why do we lovingly put our arms around each other when we hurt? Why do we speak tender words that lift each other up and keep each other going? Why do we struggle together, rallying together around our Lord and his kingdom work, yes, even during really tough times in our lives and in our world? Why do we comfort each other at funerals? Why do we remind each other that our loved ones live past this life? Why do we do that? It makes no sense ... if there is no resurrection.

The apostle Paul says it like this: **"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men"** (1 Corinthians 15:19). But my friends, my dear fellow family members in the household of God, **the resurrection changes everything**. It changes the way we see our lives. Jesus lives. **"Christ has indeed been raised from the dead,**

the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20). He is here with us right now. He is the silent guest at worship today. He is here. And he sees your pain. He knows your struggles. He understands the pressures to live self-centered lives rather than to live your lives for him.

And what is it that keeps you going? It is the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It changes everything. It gives us a proper focus on how short and temporary our lives really are in this world. It helps us see the eternal perspective of living with the victorious Lord Jesus Christ who permanently pins his enemies in hell. The resurrection helps us see that we are standing with Jesus in the glories of his presence.

It changes everything. Jesus lives and so do we. We live for him now, and we live with him forever. Easter changes everything. You can be certain of that! Amen.