



## St John Lutheran Church

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1st Cor. 15: 1-20

Christ's Assurance In An Unsure World

**When Herbert Hoover** was nominated for the presidency in 1928...**he like** many other people... **had great hopes** for our future. "**We in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land,**" he said. "**The poorhouse is vanishing from among us.**"

**One year later... the stock** market crashed. **The Great Depression** fell upon America... **drying up** jobs... **closing** schools and **creating** shantytowns... **dividing** families as father hit the road in search of work. **But one result** of this horrible event sticks out among the others...**over the** course of just four years... **the suicide** rate in America skyrocketed 33%.

**People killed themselves** in those days for one basic reason... **they had** lost hope. **They placed all** of their trust and confidence into a "god" that failed them. **They believed in** the stock market. **They trusted the** market would provide the key to their future... **and when** the market crashed they suddenly had nothing left... **no future... no confidence... no peace... no assurance... no hope.**

**Daily life provides** plenty of opportunities for despair. **There are many** and various opportunities which present themselves... **opportunities to** lose or to abandon the confidence and the peace and the assurance that are now yours through Christ Jesus.

**I look out** at the congregation as I preach and I see vacant seats that were once filled with our beloved members...**members who** have been called out of this veil of tears. **During the past** ten and half years that I have been your pastor we have done some 57 funerals...**and with** each funeral there is a story...**with each** funeral there is a loved one taken from us...**there is** an empty spot...**a hole** in the fabric of our lives. **With each story** there is that harsh reality that in this world grief... **and the** pain of loss is just a breath away from any of us. **Some of us** have passed from old age after a long and fruitful life. **Some died early** due to cancer or some other disease. **We have** lost infants...**and** we have lost teenagers...**and sometimes** we just don't know why!

**WE have suffered** these things together... **as a** family of faith. **These things have** not happened to mere individuals or families in our midst... **but WE** have suffered these things together. **Garrison Keillor, the** great storyteller, once described winter by saying... "**Winter is not a personal experience. the others are just as cold as you are.**" **The same thing** may be said of the Church: "**The Church is not a personal experience. the others suffer just as you do.**" **This is exactly** what St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12: "**You are the body of Christ, and each of you is a part of it. if one part of the body suffers, every part suffers with it**" (1 Corinthians 12: 27, 26).

**No matter who** is afflicted...**no matter** which one is taken from us...**we suffer** the grief together. **All God's people** wince at the news that another brother or sister has left us. **We know that** our loved one is with the Lord and we give thanks for that...**but we** still grieve and face the earthly reality that this world is sometimes a very painful place to be. **And as we** face this reality we sometimes pray "**Lord, have mercy!**" **Together we cringe** under the heartbreaking realization that life here is only fleeting. **Together we pray** on behalf of each afflicted family "**Christ, have mercy!**" **None of us alone... for every** Child of God gathered here breathes for them the same, repeating and unrelenting prayer: "**Lord, have mercy! Christ, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!**" "**You are the body of Christ, and each of you is a part of it. if one part of the body suffers, every part suffers with it**" (1 Corinthians 12: 27, 26). **In this way**, we "**bear one another's burdens**" (Galatians 6:2); **in this way** we love our neighbor.

**What else are** we to do? **Are we to** believe our God to be as fragile and shakable as the stock market? **Shall we**, in the face of such turmoil's as these, **cast aside** our Spirit-given hope and confidence and somehow conclude that our God has failed us? **Are we to** despair, as did the people of 1929, and give up any hope of the future? **Left to our** own devices...**left to** our own thoughts and our own ability to control our lives...**we just might!**

**What St. Paul** says here is true: "**If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men**" (1 Corinthians 15:19). **If the Christian** faith is merely a petty preoccupation for us so long as we live on this earth... **then we** are the greatest of all fools! **If it is** true that there is no life for us after this one... **no existence** beyond this thin eggshell in which we now live... **then we** are beyond stupid... **beyond insane**, "**brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed**" (2 Peter 2:12).

**Yet still we** do not give up hope. **We enter the** operating room with trembling lips and shaking knees... **but still we enter**. **We watch our** loved ones return to ashes and to dust... **yet we** do not despair. **We trust completely** in the Word and Promise of God, that "**a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out**" (John 5:28). "**For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed**" (1 Corinthians 15:52). "**We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed**" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

**St. Paul is right:** "**If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.**" **But our hope** goes way beyond this life. "**I KNOW that my Redeemer lives,**" said Job. "**And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God**" (Job 19:25). **Your Christ** suffers and dies and rises again **not just for your life in this world... but for your life in the world to come!** **As it is written,** "**Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep**" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

**And if your Jesus is only** the firstfruit of the resurrection... **surely other** fruits shall follow. **Surely all who** have been incorporated into the Body of Christ... **by the** miracle of Baptism... **shall follow** where Christ the head leads. **For where the** head is.... **there also** is the body. **As it is written in** Ephesians, "**Christ is the head of the Church, His body, of which He is the Savior**" (Ephesians 5:23).

**"If Christ has not been raised,"** says St. Paul, **"your faith is futile"** (1 Corinthians 15:17). **But Christ has** been raised from the dead, and the faith God has given you is by no means futile. **But rather, because** Christ is risen from the dead, God has provided **you with a living faith... a lively hope, and a sure and certain future expectation that shall be fulfilled.** **"If Christ has not been raised,"** says St. Paul, **"you are still in your sins."** **But since Christ** has indeed risen, your sins have been removed from you and washed forever downstream in the rich flood of Jesus' blood. **"If Christ has not been raised,"** says St. Paul, **"then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished"** (1 Corinthians 15:18). **But Christ is risen! And those who go** before you in the faith shall also inevitably rise.

**This is the** complete confidence we take into every battle... every heartache... every instance of suffering and grief: **"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all-how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?"** (Romans 8:31-32).

**This is what** the faith is all about my friends! **This is the Good News! The question is: "Why do we yet hold to this faith...this Gospel when we see so much pain around us? How can we be so certain of God's Promise when the world around us is so absolutely uncertain?"**

**The reason is** that Christ will not leave us alone! **Everything He has** done for us ...and everything He still does for us... **is for our comfort...for our peace and assurance! Our Lord's Promise** in Matthew 28 is that He will be with us to the end of the Age...**to the very last day...He will not leave us alone!**

**Our God provides** this church...**this congregation** so that He can gather His people around His Word and His Sacraments. **He gives us** His Word so that we can hear it...**read it** and study it! **God's Word is** the most powerful thing ever to exist. **When God speaks** things happen...**just like** when He spoke and the world and everything in it was created. **Just like when** our Lord Jesus spoke to heal the sick, the blind and the lame...**just like** when our Lord Jesus spoke Lazarus was raised from the dead...**just like** He spoke and Jairus's daughter was raised from death as well!

**That Word of God** is given to you with purpose! **That purpose is** not only to save you...**but to** comfort you and assure you as you face the onslaught of uncertainty around you everyday! **That's why our** Lord gave us Baptism. **This act that** seems so simple... **does what God says it does!!** **Baptism gives life...life eternal! Not only that...but Baptism** is given so that you can touch and feel what is happening to you...**oh you** may not feel the Holy Spirit enter your soul...**but you** can hear the pastor recite God's Word and Promise...**you can** feel the water being poured on your head...**and if** you doubt that any of this happened to you...**you are** given witnesses...**sponsors who** are to remind you of what happened to you that great day you were baptized. **That you were** baptized and made a child of God and an heir to an eternal inheritance!

**To continually assure** you and comfort you...**our Lord** comes to you in His Supper! **Here He** crosses time and eternity and He touches you with His Very Body and Blood...**that same** Crucified and Risen Body and Blood comes to you in, with and under the Bread and Wine of the Supper. **Why?? So you can** touch and feel what is going on...**so our** Lord can touch you personally and

assure you that you are His and that He loves and He will never leave you...**no matter** what befalls you here in this putrid world!

**Everything our Lord** does for us is for our assurance. **That is why** we are so very careful never to stray from what our Lord teaches us. **For if we** stray from the Truth...**we wander** into the devil's clutches and doubt, fear and uncertainty would overcome us. **There is a** reason that our Lord tells us to "**keep everything I have taught you**" in Matthew 28. **There is a** reason that our Lord says: "**If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.**" John 8:31ff

**Everything our Lord does for us...everything He does for us is for our assurance...so that you will know...understand and trust that your sins are forgiven and you do have Life eternal...in the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit...Amen.**

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