

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 - "God's Footprints"

Pr. Kurt A. VanFossan - The Resurrection of our Lord - Easter-B 2024

Jesus Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! The Alleluia's are back, and even though those in our Gospel reading hadn't yet seen the risen Christ, by the time St. Paul wrote our Epistle reading from 1 Corinthians not only had the women and the apostles seen Jesus, but He had also "*appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom were still alive*" when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians.

It's these historical events that I want to focus on this Easter Sunday. But first let me share a more modern day incident about an American who was crossing the Arabian desert with a native Arab guide. The Arab guide was a Christian, the American was not. Every morning, noon and night, the unbelieving American noticed that his Christian guide would kneel on the sand to pray. Finally, early one morning the American asked his guide: "How do you know there is a God?"

The guide looked at the American for a moment and then replied, "I'll answer that question if you permit me to ask you one first. How did we know this morning that it was a camel and not a man that had passed our tent while we slept last night?"

The American laughed and said: "We could tell that it was a camel by the hoof prints in the sand. They were not the footprints of a man."

The guide then looked to the East where the rising sun was causing the horizon to glow with brilliant colors of yellow, orange and red. Pointing to the sun, he said: "Neither is that the footprint of a man."

The picture on the front of our bulletin for today shows the rising sun shining on three crosses and an empty tomb, reminding us (in the message from an angel that), "*He has risen!*" God's Son (S-O-N) has risen indeed! Alleluia!

The world around us is filled with the footprints of our Almighty God. Even though God worked through Andrea and me to create our beautiful children, when they were born there was no doubt that they were the footprint or work of God, not man. And on this Easter morning, we see more footprints of God which, although not as complex as human beings, in their own way also remind us of God's glory. I'm speaking of the beautiful flowers, especially the Easter lilies.

But fortunately, while all of God's footprints are beautiful, our Lord has left us with something more than just footprints. By themselves, while the beauty and complexity of creation certainly reveals to us the existence of an almighty God, such knowledge would still leave us guessing many things about God. That's why our heavenly Father has also given us His Word.

In the Bible, God joins all the pieces of the puzzle together. He tells us not only how evil came into the world to try and destroy all that God created, but God also tells us how He works to save us from that evil. Then God gives us even more than His written word. In order to work out our salvation as He promised, it was necessary for God to become a man in Jesus Christ so that, in our place, He could overcome what we would never be able to overcome: our sins, death and the "vice-grip" the devil had on us.

Thanks be to God that our faith is not based on mere footprints in the sand, which leave us guessing many things about God. Instead, our faith is founded on God's Word, together with His physical presence on this earth through His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who "*came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (Mark 10:45). That's what makes our salvation so certain. It's based not on the subjective thoughts and guesses of man but on the objective Word of God, which has been verified through the physical/historical life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

St. Paul brings this to our attention in our Epistle reading. "*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.*"

Even though Jesus' resurrection from the dead was past history at the time Paul wrote this letter, he wrote it during a time when many of the people who had witnessed Jesus' horribly public death on the cross as well as His glorious resurrection from the dead were still alive to tell about it. All people had to do to verify what Paul said was to ask another eye witnesses.

Our salvation is the result of a physical event in history, the death and resurrection of God's only Son in the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. And through another historical event, our baptism, God physically applied to us all the benefits of what Jesus did for us. Therefore, when our crucified and risen Lord says, "*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved*" (Mark 16:16), our salvation is secured by the promise and power of our almighty, risen from the dead, Savior, Jesus Christ. True man and true God.

Of course, there are people who can look at the beauty of the rising sun, a flower, and a newborn baby, together with God's Word, and still deny that there is a God. Such people are good reminders that no matter how many facts they are given, even if they were eyewitnesses of those facts, when it comes to believing in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin, death and the devil, that's something only God, by His Holy Spirit, can produce. "*No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit*" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Our faith in Jesus Christ is evidence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, who enables us to confidently put our faith into practice through our everyday words and actions, so that the footprints we leave in this life point others to the way of eternal peace, happiness, and life through Jesus Christ. He is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children's Sermon] The good news God has for us this morning is that Jesus left us with more than an empty tomb or an empty cross on that first Easter Sunday. This stained glass window only reminds of an empty cross. By itself, that's not much to go on.

But what does this window remind us of? Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world was dead, but now He is alive! And He's flying a flag with a cross on it to remind us that through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, He overpowered our sins, death and the devil so that we can live forever with Him in Paradise! Here's a walnut for you that, when you break it open, will remind you of this same good news.