

Rev. Dan Welch Easter Day 4-1-18

(9:15 and 10:30 Services)

Text- 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

He is Risen! (He is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!) Hear again verses 3 and 4 of 1 Corinthians 15 where St. Paul writes:

“For what I received I passed on to you as of **first importance**: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”

What’s most important? How would you describe what’s **of first importance** in life? I’d say that anything **that** important would be the foundation for life. It’s the core, heart, basis, and center of who we are and what we do. Something of first importance has us coming back again and again because we can’t live without it. It gives us hope for the future. It provides a reason to live. **What’s of first importance in your life?**

The apostle Paul answers that question for you. Most important is Jesus. Jesus died, was buried, and rose again. Nothing else comes close! To be sure family, friends, work, and community are also important. But of first importance is Jesus, especially His resurrection from the dead.

Jesus is the foundation for life. He is the basis of what we do and who

we are. Easter is the heart and core of what the Church believes. For two thousand years, the message that has been handed down and proclaimed is “He is risen! (He is risen indeed! Alleluia!)”

Why do we keep coming back week after week? What holds the Church together? Jesus does. Not a building. Not the pastors. Not money. It’s Jesus; Jesus alive and active among us. That’s what brings us back. We can’t live without Him.

All our hopes are tied up in Him. When you stand in front of a casket and reach out to touch the lifeless body of a loved one, your hope is to be together again; to see and touch each other in **eternal life**. Because Jesus Himself died and conquered death, all who have trusted in Christ will conquer death and live forever in both body and soul.

Jesus also gives us purpose in the life we live right now. It’s not just one dreary day after another without any good reason for getting up each morning. No, each day we greet with, “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Ps 118:24). Each day with our resurrected Jesus we become more and more alive.

Nothing else compares to Him. Jesus makes family, friendships, work, community, and the rest of our lives important, significant,

alive, filled with purpose. Yet none is as important as Jesus Himself. Jesus Christ, dead on the cross and risen from the dead now and forever, is of first importance. Remember those calendars with red-letter days as special days? I'd make one with Easter as a **gold**-letter day—the most special day of all, of first importance.

Yes, Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the most important event in all **history**. Christian scholar and author Jaroslav Pelikan put it this way about the resurrection: "If Christ is risen, nothing else matters. And if Christ is not risen- nothing else matters". In other words, everything centers and pivots on this: If Jesus rose from the dead, then He is Lord of all. If He did not rise from the dead, then our faith is in vain; useless, as St. Paul says later on in 1 Corinthians 15 (v.17). In which case, you and I and all Christians are hopeless and are the most pitiful people in the world. But we believe that Jesus **has** risen from the dead. In fact, we've staked our **faith**, our **lives** and our eternal **destiny**, on the Scriptural **and** historical evidence that Jesus conquered death! And since Jesus rose from the dead, we, and all of our loved ones in Christ will rise also! That's what we celebrate with great joy this day! Jesus' resurrection makes all the

difference, that's why it is such a gold-letter day!

The problem is once you walk out of the Easter service that gold-letter quality seems to fade away. **Life** takes over and pushes Jesus out of that first importance spot. Too many days we barely think about Him, let alone have Him as most important. What happens to our Easter celebration? What happens that makes it seem of so **little** importance?

As for coming back again and again, those who do come back week after week to worship aren't always focused on Jesus. I hear of congregations where members spend more time arguing about things like how hot or cold the sanctuary should be than actually talking about Jesus. Yes, arguments, money troubles, love for a particular way of doing things become so important that those who **do** come back to church week after week are too often treating Jesus as of **little** importance.

And those hopes we have in Jesus for eternal life—doubt and grief are never far away. On any day, drive down to the funeral home. Get out of the car and walk in. You'll see families in tears and bodies in caskets.

You'll see it's just another day of hurt and sorrow. You'll see nothing changes when it comes to death and

the grave. That stark reality can bring the doubts hidden deep within to the surface, and Jesus seems of so little importance when the tears and the ache inside are so real.

But most days are nothing special. Most days are just another day to live. Maybe we're so busy that we don't have much time for Jesus. Maybe we're struggling with family troubles, financial problems, anxiety or depression. Perhaps the days bring nothing new, just the same old, same old stuff. So little purpose for life. So little importance for Jesus.

Is the day after Easter, or the week after we celebrated Jesus' resurrection, a gold-letter day? a red-letter day? Or is it more just *another* day, and Jesus seems of so little importance? If it is, how do we get back to Jesus of first importance?

The apostle Paul says the resurrection is of first importance, and then lists those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection the first time. Peter, the apostles, five hundred people at one time, James, and then Paul. No question about it, for these eyewitnesses, Jesus' resurrection was of *first* importance. The day they saw Jesus alive again was a gold-letter day. And every day lived in the power and presence of Jesus was a day of purpose and hope, a day to stand on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ, a day to come back again and

again to the heart and core of who they had become and what they would do with their lives.

But what about us? We can't see the risen Lord with our own eyes. No first-time excitement for us. What's more, many of us have been through Easter many, many times. How does Jesus become of first importance when tomorrow or Thursday seems like just another day?

We do what Paul did. And Peter, the disciples, and the 500 who saw Jesus. They lived 10, 20, 30 years or more after Jesus appeared to them. They didn't live just on the memory of Jesus appearing to them, but by coming back again and again to speak and listen to what was of first importance, to meet the risen Jesus in a new and special way, and to encourage one another.

So, the Church will do what it has always done. We will stand together and say the creeds. We will say over and over again that what is most important is "I believe . . . in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. . . . He was crucified, died and was buried... The third day He rose again from the dead." We will baptize children in the name of this risen Jesus. We will proclaim Jesus in our sermons. We will celebrate His resurrection every Sunday, because Sunday is the day of the week He rose from the dead.

But even more, we come back *again and again* because here we

meet Jesus, risen from the dead in a most special way. In Leonardo da Vinci's famous mural The Last Supper, Jesus and the disciples are all on one side. That way, everyone on the other side of the table would be joining in the meal, seated across from Jesus. When you come up and have that little wafer, which is Christ's body, placed in your hand, when you sip that tiny bit of wine, which is Christ's blood you are actually in the presence and the power of Jesus, alive and working in our lives, reaching down to the very heart and core of who we are and what we do. Here He delivers to you personally the forgiveness of your sins and strengthens you in your faith in Him until He comes again. This happens every Sunday!

So, yes, come back again to worship, because here we celebrate throughout the service what's most important. Mark it in gold on the calendar. The day we worship is the day we come back again to be with each other, to encourage one another, with what is of *first* importance.

But not just here at church. Whether you're at work or school or with your family or in the car or wherever is so important that day, it's not just another day. "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." Remember that every day is another

day with Jesus. It's another day He has made. What a day it becomes when Jesus is of first importance. Yes, Jesus, the resurrected Lord, is of first importance — with Him every day is a gold-letter day! He is Risen! (He is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!) Amen!