

**Easter; March 31, 2024**

**1 Corinthians 15:19-26**

Is it real? You see a social media post and wonder, "Is that what they really look like, or is this six filters and Photoshop?" Is that video clip real, or just a really good deep fake? A teacher reviews a paper written a little too well she has to wonder: *"Did they suddenly get more intelligent or is this intelligence artificial?"*

*Artificial intelligence*, or AI, has been making a lot of news recently. It causes people to question what's real and what's not. When it comes to AI, some people are surprised by it. Some are scared of it. Some are skeptical of it. Yet one thing is pretty amazing about AI is that it can process a tremendous amount of data. The conclusion or final product can be produced can be pretty accurate and amazing. Some have said that it may eventually surpass all human. Yet, for that to happen, it needs a body to be truly human.

That's why we're here today. Because to be truly human, you need a body. Human existence is fundamentally grounded in the physical world. That has been true ever since God created the first man, Adam, forming him from the dust of the ground and then breathing into him the breath of life. Adam had a body and soul; he was both physical and spiritual.

That's the life that God intended for mankind: life in a perfect world, and life that never ends. But that's not how it turned out. In our reading from 1 Corinthians this morning St. Paul said: **"For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."**

Those few words say it all about mankind's existence in a broken world. Paul's point is simple. When our first father, Adam, sinned against God by eating the fruit forbidden to him, his act of disobedience affected every one of his descendants and every bit of creation. In Adam all die. That means that when Adam brought sin into this world, it did not come alone. It was accompanied sin's penalty: Death.

God hadn't created humans to die, but death became our destiny. All the death and tragedy in this world, was not God's plan, but was the consequence one man, Adam, and every man and woman who followed him. We have kept right on sinning, just like our father Adam. Each of us here today is broken in our own unique way. Now that brokenness might be on full display for everyone to see, or it might be hidden pretty well, but you know it's there. And every hour we spend in this life, brings us closer to the death that we run from but can never escape. In Adam all die. All. We can't escape it. We can't stop it.

That's what makes this day so awesome. This man, Jesus Christ, is so important. Even though we are broken, sinful people, God loved us. He loved us so much that he set in motion a plan to rescue us from ourselves, to rescue us from this evil world, to rescue us from death itself. To do that, the Son of God needed a body. He had to join us in this flesh and blood existence that is grounded in the physical world. So, he became one of us. God took on a human body—he became truly human so that he could right everything that we humans had wronged. He became truly human so he could bear our burdens, carry our sorrows. He became truly human so that he could die to pay for the sins of the world, to pay for yours and mine.

To be our Savior he needed to die, but to be our savior he also needed to not stay dead. If Jesus had simply died, he would be no different than any other man, and our faith would be futile, and we would still be lost in our brokenness. But, Paul says.... **"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep."**

The reality of Christ's resurrection means that the message of Christianity is the most inclusive message in the world. It says that God loves everyone and sent his Son to save every man, woman and child who ever lived and who's ever going to live. But it also means that the message of Christianity is at the same time, the most exclusive message in the world, because it says that forgiveness and peace with God can only be found in the person Jesus Christ who said, **"I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father, except through me."**

Therefore, the most important question to ask on Easter morning is this – *"Is it real?"* If it is real, then it changes everything doesn't.

The resurrection of Jesus really happened. On that first Easter morning, Jesus Christ, pulled himself back into the land of the living, and the man who was dead, grasped life and made it his again. Only one person in all the world could do this. Only the Son of God, who made life, who is life, could lay down his life and take it up again. Do you see what that means? He is the resurrection, and he is life, and our faith in him is based on that one unchanging fact: Christ is risen!

There were a lot of Jews who were crucified in first century Palestine. Only one of them came back from the dead. There are lots of founders of religions throughout the world. Only one of the really rose. Jesus Christ physically rose from the dead. That is the fundamental message of Christianity. When the disciples went out and took the message of Jesus to the world, they didn't call themselves the *witnesses of the crucifixion*, they call themselves the *witnesses of the Resurrection*. There were hundreds of people who also saw the Resurrected Jesus. They sat with him. They ate with him. They held him. They touched him. The Resurrection of Jesus is REAL.

**“For as in Adam all die, so in Christ, all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits, then when he comes, those who belong to him.”**

The day that Jesus rose from the dead occurred on a special day in the Jewish calendar. It happened on the day called **“Festival of First Fruits.”** That was a day when God's people brought in an offering, the first sheaves of the grain harvest. You thanked God by offering the first fruits off the land, and you knew that the whole harvest would follow.

For 1500 years God's people brought their first fruits in on this day, to get ready for this moment when the Son of God would rise from the dead on the festival of the first fruits. Do you see what that means? The resurrection of Jesus is just the beginning of the great harvest that is yet to come. It means that the reality of Jesus' resurrection guarantees the reality of yours. What's waiting for you is not an eternity of floating on a cloud in heaven singing hymns all day. No, what's waiting for you is real resurrection—to be truly human means having a body and soul. That's exactly what Jesus promises you. That on the last day, we will be raised, just like Jesus, and we will live, body and soul in a new heaven and new earth. We will walk and talk and laugh and love in a world made perfect, where every wrong has been made right and every broken bit has been restored.

**“And 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.”** That's what the reality of the Resurrection brings us. He is risen. He is risen indeed. Amen.