

## THE RESURRECTION – ST. PAUL

Consider:

### ACTS OF APOSTLES 1: 6-11

<sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup> He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” <sup>9</sup> When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup> They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

### COLOSSIANS 1: 15-20

<sup>15</sup> Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; <sup>16</sup> for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Somewhere between Luke’s Ascension / Pentecost and the Cosmic Jesus of the non-Pauline work of Colossians is Paul’s experience of Jesus as Lord, Savior, and life-giving Spirit. Paul’s sense of self, vocation and mission is empowered by his experience of the Risen Jesus appearing to him in the crucial moments of his life and work. There is no decisive moment save for that realization of God’s unbounded love for Paul. Paul experienced that love of God in the appearances he experienced of the Risen Jesus. Paul’s proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus was based on his overwhelming experience of Jesus in his life. This abiding presence of Jesus caused Paul to long for the fullness of Christ’s coming (Parousia). The Resurrection of Christ became a personal reality for Paul.

Even if for Paul Christ has become a reality of cosmic significance, the power of his resurrection is a matter of his enduring presence in Paul’s life and ours. Being in Christ is both a blessing and serious responsibility. It carries with it the responsibility to strive to be like the one we proclaim.

## I CORINTHIANS 15: 1-11

**15** Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, <sup>2</sup> through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

<sup>3</sup> For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. <sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. <sup>11</sup> Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

... if you hold firmly to the message  
that I proclaimed to you—  
unless you have come to believe in vain

The dying and the rising of Christ is at the core of Paul's thought and the essence of Christian imagination. The Baptismal rites celebrate in vivid symbol the reality of the actuality lived out in the affairs of everyday life. The "dying" occurs in life as it is. The disciples of Jesus seek to be faithful no matter how troubled the waters of life might be or become.

For I handed on to you as of first importance  
what I in turn had received

Paul situates his teaching, mission, and self within the tradition he has received. For all his attempt to hold fast to tradition, Paul's genius will cause him to think and act in ways contributing to the tradition he has received. The genius of Paul will cause him trouble and tribulation. Perhaps for Paul, fidelity to tradition is not a static reality of compliance but a dramatic adventure in the saving power of Christ's Spirit.

Christ died for our sins  
in accordance with the scriptures

The historical execution on Calvary has been re-interpreted in the tradition Paul proclaims. What was a cruel execution is now seen as the means of salvation in which Jesus freely gave of himself. The Scriptures become the source for understanding the actions and motivation of Jesus.

<sup>4</sup> and that he was buried

Rarely does Paul mentioned the burial of Jesus. In fact, this may be the only time he does. This helps us to understand the creedal nature of I Corinthians 15: 1-11. It is what Paul received. He is faithful to the tradition received as a foundation for seeking the implications of what it might mean to be risen with Christ.

he was raised on the third day  
in accordance with the scriptures

The literal “third day” would be the first day of the week signifying a “new” creation, a “new” day of liberation and salvation. This is not a fulfillment text pointing to any one Scripture but an interpretative text inviting a serious and probing search of the Scripture.

Last of all, as to one untimely born,  
he appeared also to me ...  
<sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles,  
unfit to be called an apostle,  
because I persecuted the church of God

Paul claims no superiority to the Apostles of the Tradition. His inclusion in that rank is purely by the grace of God. His birth into Christ, unlikely as it was, was no less real than that of any other Apostle. A careful reading of the text points to Paul credibility as based in his experience of Jesus risen initiated by God in Christ. Paul does not claim his legitimacy from apostolic empowerment but merely and solely by God’s graciousness.

<sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am,  
and his grace toward me has not been in vain

Paul has responded to the grace and graciousness of God in his missionary work on behalf of the community he once persecuted. This “diligent and hard” work of Paul is a further indication of God’s graciousness to Paul. Grace cannot be accepted passively as the effort and suffering of Paul indicates.

<sup>11</sup> Whether then it was I or they,  
so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

The graciousness of God invites the Apostles to be gracious in their missionary zeal and work. What matters for Paul is whether or not the Gospel is proclaimed. There is to be no competition in the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus. Disciples are to be keenly aware that they do what they do by the sheer graciousness of God.

Consider:

## I CORINTHIANS 15: 42-49

<sup>42</sup> So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. <sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. <sup>44</sup> It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup> Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup> But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. <sup>47</sup> The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. <sup>48</sup> As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

<sup>45</sup> Thus it is written,  
“The first man, Adam, became a living being”;  
the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

Paul seems to think the Holy Spirit of God and the person of Jesus somehow “fuse” together in the aftermath of the resurrection. This Risen Jesus takes on the attributes of God’s saving and creating Spirit. Jesus has become the revelation and the factual realization of the “last” person. Paul is here thinking of the fullness of time in which Christ will come in all his glory revealing our glory. The risen Christ became what we will be in the fullness of time. Yet, in some real way, what we will be is what we have already become by virtue of the Holy Spirit of God.

Consider the transformation celebrated in these powerful verses:

## I CORINTHIANS 15: 50-58

<sup>50</sup> What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. <sup>51</sup> Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup> When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

<sup>55</sup> “Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

<sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.