

**Sermon Notes** January 19, 2020 **Focus** 1st Corinthians - the main thing. [Lectionary Readings](#)

Paul can be hard to swallow. All his bragging and yelling is burdensome. To me, he seems a bit of a drama addict. For example, in the book of Galatians he writes, "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand." Who does that? However, he was exceptionally good at keeping the main thing the main thing: The living resurrection of Jesus. Paul was peerless when it came to his stalwart commitment to Christ raised from the dead. He processed everything in his world and tried to build faith communities on this and this alone.

He was not the most well liked. Paul probably had a shrill voice and literally killed people with his preaching. At times, he sounds a little like my father trying to diagnose other people's ailments. There were nicer people, better preachers, and more skilled community organizers than Paul. But nobody "out resurrected" him. He had this overarching vision of Jesus present and alive. It was this conviction that drove him to plant churches instead of trying to kill them (remember Paul was Saul, the terrorizer of Christians),

Paul experienced resurrection in a dramatic fashion (Damascus road) and at the same time lived with Jesus through all the mundane tediousness of imprisonment, courts and endless travel. However, Paul never got lost in a mystical cloud. A few heavenly visions aside, most of Paul's writings were extremely practical: know and make known Jesus raised from the dead.

You can easily take issue with some conclusions he drew - I do. Women silent in church - *nope*. But, I challenge you to take issue with his single minded commitment to create a community of resurrection people. Take his guidebook, draw different conclusions, and practice resurrection faith. You might discover the same tools he used and hold to the convictions he did.

**It's not a 21st Century thing** --the biggest mistake we make with Paul, is that we treat his writings as if they were meant for us 20+ centuries later. Let me explain. Paul was not writing for history. He was writing to a group he thought he could help organize their lives around Jesus. Paul might have screamed blasphemy if he knew that we put his letters to fledgling churches like 1st Corinthians in the Bible on equal footing with for example: Deuteronomy.

**Translation is essential** We can do the work of translation into our own context using Paul's principles. For example, In Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church, there were 3ish problems common to us and 2ish unique to that era:

1. *divisive squabbling and leader worship* (then and now) - not much translation needed.
2. *blush worthy sexual antics* - We are actually much more restrained than the Corinthians were. Mistranslations happen far too often when we bluntly apply Corinthian sexual mores and problems to our own.
3. *Meat as religious expression* --Mostly back then. We don't imbue our dinner plate with magical qualities unless of course the steak is cooked to perfection. Back then they would offer sanctified meat to a God and sit down to a big communal meal. Christians were wondering if they should eat this idolatrous meat or not.
4. *The insufferably religious.* (OMG then and now). Back then, it was speaking in tongues. Now, there are so many more ways to be insufferable.
5. *Resurrection*-- many in Corinth thought it was a cute and quaint idea (then and now)

Friends I am going to go from preaching to meddling. We are not as wild as those darn Corinthians but like Corinth in problem 1, we at St. Timothy's squabble over who said what and how they said it. We chew endlessly about how years past were better / worse than the current. Unlike Corinth in problem 2, our sexual antics have got nothing on them. Also unlike Corinth in problem 3, we don't pray with our steak, but we **do** argue and get offended over liturgical minutiae and who is the most correct.

Like the Corinthian problem 4, we look down on those who are not as enlightened as we are. Most of us are in the "thank God I'm not a fundamentalist" camp and even some of us cross our fingers at certain parts of the service/liturgy. It is one thing to have clear preferences, but it is so easy to become insufferable.

Division and the rest of this heap is not the main thing. The main thing is that God is alive and is resurrected in each of us. Which brings me to problem 5, Resurrection. I challenge you to process *everything* in your life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

You can be so far left that the social democratic party feels like a bunch of stodgy reactionaries. You can be so bitcoin-libertarian anarchist that even doomsday preppers feel a little too soft for you. Either way, I ask you to choose to see everyone and everything through resurrection eyes. This is how I keep meaning grounded in my life and it will allow you to course-correct when what you do stops giving life. How would you approach the world differently if you (at the guts and bones level) lived and breathed resurrection? These were the questions that Paul insisted on asking in First Corinthians. And they are worth asking again.

**Todd**

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**Bonus:** One of my favorite podcast episodes of all time tells the story of a journalist who is locked out his Jerusalem hostel. He is forced to sleep near where Jesus was crucified. Now this spot is commemorated by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The next morning he comes to believe in the resurrection. It is simple and powerful.

<https://www.thisamericanlie.org/1/new-beginnings> (you can skip prologue and go to "act 1")