

“CHRIST IS RISEN”

Hebrews 1:1-9

1 In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,
2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things,
and through whom also he made the universe.

3 The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being,
sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins,
he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

5 For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father”?
Or again, “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son”?

6 And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.”

7 In speaking of the angels he says, “He makes his angels spirits, and his servants flames of fire.”

8 But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;
a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.

9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;
therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.”

Introduction

Christmas catalogues have been filling my mailboxes at home and on line. JCPenney, LLBean, Hickory Farms... They started arriving at the end of summer. Holiday decorations began going up in October. The November and December shopping spree is in full swing. Christmas makes itself felt long before December 25th.

And yet, Advent is traditionally a penitential season where the color purple is visible in Sunday worship. The faith, hope and love in I Corinthians 13 are meant to help us face the realities of life.

A life of faith in Jesus Christ offers a threefold perspective. It looks at the past; it lives in the present; and it has hope for the future. The phrase *mysterium fidei*, the mystery of our faith was added to words to celebrate Holy Communion at some time before the 6th century, perhaps by Pope Leo I around 450 A.D. “Christ has died (past), Christ is risen (present), Christ will come again (future). The first two receive most of the attention. Good Friday and Easter Sunday are celebrated every year. Last week, Pastor Chris preached a great sermon on Jesus’ death. Today, this one is about Jesus’ resurrection. Next Sunday, we will hear about how God’s saving purposes will find their final completion in Jesus’ coming again.

The deep-seated need for love within the human heart is met for us by God our Creator in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Despite all the strangeness and bitterness that we see in the world around us, the candle of love reminds us that our faith is way more than optimism or wishful thinking. God really loves us. Someone wrote that he cannot love more and he will not love less. “Now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

Why is love the greatest? Because in this life we need all three. But in the resurrection, we won't need faith: Jesus will be right in front of our eyes, face to face. We won't need hope for it will already be fulfilled. But we will need love; and God's love is there forever.

If you put my name in I Corinthians, it would say: "Mike is patient, Mike is kind. He isn't self-seeking. He's not easily angered." Hate to tell you – it doesn't work. Put yours in there. Can you say, "I'm patient. I keep no record of wrongs. I always preserve."

Put Jesus in place of "Love" and it's fully true. "Jesus does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. Jesus always protects. Jesus never fails." The Risen Lord Jesus is who the Bible says he is.

I. Exact Representation

Hebrews 1 put it this way: "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word."

We don't know who wrote the New Testament book of Hebrews. Whoever it was, was a great preacher. The writer took dozens of Old Testament scriptures and presents a sermon explaining how they refer to Jesus the Messiah/Savior along with words of encouragement for the Jewish Christians who received this letter. Hebrews may our earliest and most complete sermon addressed to a church community.

This is important to know that any sermon worth preaching is based on the Bible, the Word of God explained in a way that encourages faith in Christ. Whenever anyone expresses appreciation for a sermon given by Pastor Chris or me, I often say that we don't make this stuff up. The Bible has an inexhaustible supply of ideas. God's Word covers all the ground we need to know about who God is, who we are in relation to him and to one another, what to believe and how to live. It says, "God spoke" and "God has spoken." Remember how John began his gospel, writing about Jesus. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." The preacher of Hebrews proclaimed that "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word." Sustaining all things by his powerful word.

II. Resurrection Forever

Then, in verse 3, it says, "After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." Without the death and resurrection of Jesus, Christmas wouldn't mean much. Christmas as a holiday wouldn't exist. "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." Christ has died: big deal! So did Confucius and Buddha. So did Jim Jones and L. Ron Hubbard. So will Louis Farrakhan and the Dali Lama. Jesus rose again from death. He alone provided purification for our sins. No other leader ---religious, political, social or economic--- can do that.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “A love that left people alone in their guilt would not have real people as its object. So, in vicarious responsibility for people, and in His love for real human beings, Jesus becomes the one burdened by guilt.” His love took our sin and guilt upon himself and his resurrection proves him true. Hebrews goes on to say: To which of the angels or servants or to anyone else did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father”? About the Son God says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever.” Jesus Christ is God (God the Son) in perfect unity with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

In her little book *Heaven: My Father’s House*, Billy Graham’s daughter Anne tells about people who wanted to visit her father’s home in North Carolina. They would drive up to the gate, ring the bell and say, “Billy Graham, let us in. We’ve read your books, we watched you on TV, we’ve written to you, and we want to come to your house.”

And her father would say, “I don’t know you. You’re not a member of my family, and you’ve not made any arrangements to come.” But when she drove up that same driveway she’d say, “Daddy, this is Anne, and I’ve come home to see you.” The gate is thrown right open, and she goes inside, because she’s the father’s child.

Because heaven is God’s house, he has the right to decide who comes in and who stays out. He says he will welcome anyone inside his home, but they have to be born again into his family through faith in Jesus Christ. You and I can be assured that at the end of the journey, we’ll be welcomed into our Father’s arms. We’ll be welcomed there because we’re our Father’s children through faith in the Son of God Jesus Christ. All of this because of the reality of the Resurrection. Christ is risen!

Bonhoeffer was held in a Nazi prison camp for over two years before he was intentionally executed just two weeks before U.S. forces liberated the camp. While there he wrote several daily reflections on Advent and Christmas. Listen to what he wrote: “A prison cell, in which one waits, hopes - is not a bad picture of Advent. And is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened from the outside”

“Not everyone can wait: neither the sated nor the satisfied nor those without respect can wait. The only ones who can wait are people who carry restlessness around with them.”

“Who among us will celebrate Christmas correctly? Whoever finally lays down all power, all honor, all reputation, all vanity, all arrogance, all individualism beside the manger; whoever remains lowly and lets God alone be high; whoever looks at the child in the manger and sees the glory of God precisely in his lowliness.” (from *Christ in the Manger*).

Conclusion

In case you're stressed about getting ready for Christmas—with all that shopping, cleaning, and getting those Christmas decorations up – there's one company trying to help. Tesco, a British supermarket company, posted an ad for a new job—a Christmas Light Untangler. The company's website offered a 36-hour-a-week job running the unique in-store service with a friendly, flexible approach for our customers this Christmas – manning and managing the Christmas Lights Untangling stand. Candidates should be able to untangle 10 feet of Christmas lights in less than three minutes as well as check the bulbs for signs of breakage. The ideal candidate would also “be passionate about Christmas.

Songs, good feelings, nice presents, big dinners, and sweet words do not make Christmas. Christmas is saying “yes” to something beyond our highest emotions and feelings. Christmas is saying “yes” to a hope based on God’s initiative. Christmas is believing that the salvation of the world is God’s gift to be offered and received freely. Jesus has come to untangle our lives with the hope, the love, the peace, the joy of Advent and Christmas.

From Hebrews chapter 4: “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess... Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”
Let us pray together.

I Corinthians 13:4-8, 12-13

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8 Love never fails.

12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.