

July 2, 2017 “Last of All” 1 Cor. 15:1-11

I have alluded several times to the fact that I have never done this before. An exhaustive series on the resurrection of our Lord! By definition, an exhaustive series is one which endeavours to deal with all the references pertaining to the subject. So we started in one of the gospel texts that tells us the women were the first to discover the tomb was open and empty....and that an angel of God told them Jesus had risen from the dead. We next discovered that the disciples, the 12 plus many of those who were part of the 120 met on the evening of that first resurrection Sunday in the upper room, and Jesus was suddenly with them in spite of the doors being locked out of concern for their safety from the authorities. Then we learned that Cleopas and Luke were the walkers on the Emmaus Road to whom the risen Lord made an appearance. They raced back to Jerusalem to tell the others, who already knew. In John’s Gospel we returned to Easter morning to pay our respects to Mary Magdalene who was the first to see Jesus risen from the dead and the first to tell others (the disciples about it).

We spent two Sundays with the 12 in Galilee experiencing a do-over of their being called to discipleship. Jesus, risen, fed them breakfast after a marvelous catch of 153 fish and perhaps even more marvelous, the net holding fast and

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suffering no damage. Following breakfast Jesus commissioned Peter to his task as leader of the new movement. He would never forget the responsibility laid upon him as Jesus continued to charge him three times to “feed the lambs” who came to faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord. This morning we deal with the last appearance of our risen Saviour. I confess, somewhat ashamed, I have never before done an exhaustive series on the resurrection. I feel foolish about that. But it is the truth.

Once again, the importance of such a series is the reality that Jesus did not appear just once, and that was it. With each appearance of Jesus, the disciples...the 12 for sure, the 120 as well, grow in their understanding of what has occurred, they grow in their faith, and they grow in their excitement about the grace of God. And of course all of that is preparation for Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the beginning of the fact of the mission; namely, telling the rest of the world. And it is because of the boldness with which the disciples attacked their assignment, yes the 12 but also the whole of the 120...that you and I have had the privilege not only of hearing the Gospel, the good news concerning Jesus, but have ourselves come to a measure of faith such that we stand today inside the ranks of those who are called the church in our time.

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I want to share with you an experience from our recent holiday in Thunder Bay, Brian Foster, my dear friend, has a son and two daughters. We happened to be in Thunder Bay for the birthday of a number of the grandchildren that make up this large family. One of Brian's daughters married a lawyer of a family whose roots are in India. At the birthday celebration, I happened to be seated beside the other grandfather, a man who was born in India. He said to me... "Did you know the disciple Thomas visited the province in India where I was born." I replied, "No. But I did know Thomas died at Madras in India." To which he said, "Yes, the village I was born in was near Madras. The ministry of Thomas is part of my Christian heritage." And we found ourselves sharing in the fact that for everything there is a season, and time for every purpose under heaven.

I read to you this morning from 1 Corinthians 15. Here Paul is sharing with all of us, the details of how he was saved from his sin, and came to faith in Jesus. You will remember from the Book of Acts that Paul was running a personal witch-hunt to catch followers of Jesus and bring them back to Jerusalem to face the force of Jewish law, with the hopes of putting such people to death. Paul suddenly saw a

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great light. A voice addressed him with the question, “Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?”

So here is what Saul, baptized as Paul, now tells us about that experience. Here Paul begins by giving us his definition of the gospel. First. “What I received I passed on to you.” The Gospel is something one receives. And it is transmitted by believers to others. It is passed on. This has defined the mission of believers from the time of the resurrection of Jesus to the present.

The question becomes what is the Gospel? Paul defines it here in verse 3 of 1 Corinthians 15. He says it is of first importance. The most important thing in the whole wide world that one can learn, believe, receive, and share. More important than food or drink. More important than a career. More important than financial security. More important than any other information we can learn, believe, receive and share.

But what is it Paul? “That Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the 3rd day according to the Scriptures, that HE appeared to the 12 and then to Peter and then to 500...most of whom are still living.” It is as though the Damascus Road experience caused all of that Scriptural training in the Law and the prophets and the Psalms to click into place. You see, it is

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because Paul did his homework as Saul the Jew that he really understands these things. The prophecies concerning the Messiah have been fulfilled. In the death of Jesus, the crucifixion. And in the resurrection of Jesus! It is all according to the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Paul is singularly qualified to make that claim. He is the one disciple of Jesus who had been trained as a priest, as a Pharisee in the law, the prophets and the Psalms.

Paul goes on to say that Jesus appeared to James. I told you there are were more resurrection appearances than those included in the 4 gospels. Paul mentions that Jesus appeared to all the apostles. That is to say he recognizes the authority of Peter and all those disciples who were with Jesus from his baptism to and through the crucifixion-resurrection. He here recognizes the legitimacy of Mathias whom they elected to replace Judas. Which means he recognizes and has submitted to the leadership of the infant church. And then he tells us in crystal clear terms...last of all... "Jesus appeared to me." And it is important to note on the way by.....Peter and the 12 in Jerusalem recognized the legitimacy of that claim by Paul. They did not dispute his claim to have seen the risen Lord.

One last thing before we leave this series. Paul said Jesus appeared to 500 believers most of whom are still

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alive...some have died....but most of them are still alive. He has a reason for attesting to that fact. Anything and everything that Paul has said about Jesus, he is willing to have put to this test. Ask those who were there, whether or not I have spoken truthfully, whether or not I got it right. And no one, Roman or Jew ever challenged Paul's or Peter's facts. In that time there was no question that Jesus had been seen risen from the dead. There were so many living witnesses. Witnesses. Witnesses.

Let us pray;

Lord we give thanks for what the hymn writer has called amazing grace. That you died to save sinners. People like us. That you rose to save sinners. People like us. We thank you for the soundness of the line of testimony. We thank you for the yardstick of truth, the law and the prophets and the Psalms in the Old Testament. Grant that in the power of the Holy Spirit we may serve YOU in these times. As witnesses, witnesses, witnesses. Amen