

1 Corinthians 15: 19-26, 57-58 “He is Risen! Therefore...”

1. Hope seems to be in fairly short supply at present. Why do you think that is?

I would think you wouldn't have much trouble getting things going with this question. It could take up your whole conversation, let it go long enough to get people talking and engaged. We are in a season globally of successive negative events that have predisposed us to anticipating a future of more of the same.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:19-26, 57-58

2. Reflecting on the passage what is the nature of the hope that Paul says is ours in light of the resurrection?

(19) It is a hope that goes beyond the bounds of our lifespan.

(20) Jesus is the first fruits of this hope – the image means the first taste of an actual future – the guarantee that there is more to come

(23) Jesus' resurrection becomes the prototype of our resurrection. His resurrection body foreshadows the nature of our resurrection body.

(24) The fullness of the Kingdom will come – where everything that is destroying God's good creation is done away with – sin, death, disease, injustice will be wiped away...

3. Anticipating the retort – “How can the act of one person (Jesus' resurrection) bring all of this about” – Paul leans into an image he often uses – in Adam all die, in Christ shall all be made alive. What are the results of our being in Adam? How are we to find ourselves in Christ?

Adam's act of disobedience – Adam's fall – led to fallenness for all, sin in all, death for all, and rippled out through human history to catastrophic impact – violence, war, ethnic cleansing, injustice, greed to name but a few...

To be “in Christ” is to be united to him by faith – such that whatever he wins we win – whatever he accomplishes – we accomplish –

It is important here to differentiate between a faith which is intellectual assent, to a faith that is believing into – a movement of the will which is consistent with our proclaimed conviction. That is to be seen as faith “in Christ”.

4. (vs. 58) How can being in Christ, receiving his victory on our behalf, render us steadfast and immovable in the changes and chances of life?

In the sermon Tim used the following illustration which may help with your discussion.

Some of our most beloved stories in literature contain common story lines – there is a love to be found – an enemy to be defeated – a people to protect – a future to be secured – and the most masterful story tellers lead us on a journey where how we hope the story ends seems in jeopardy – the love is lost – the hero betrayed – the enemies diabolical ends seem inevitable – and the best of writers are able to bring us to feel as if such things are actually happening – so we feel the pain – sorrow – despair – anger – worry – fear

But what if we started by reading the last chapter – discovering how it all ended up – love restored – enemy vanquished – future secured – well yes it would ruin the story – but the many twists and turns where such an end were in jeopardy - wouldn't have quite the same power to stir up the sorrow – despair – anger – fear – worry - we would be at some level steadfast – immovable...

The resurrection reveals the last chapter – we know how the story ends – the changes and chances of life – that series of successive negative events will yes rightly stir up worry and fear and pain and sorrow – but underneath will be that hope – a foundation of sure trust that all things will be remade – shot through with his love – beauty – justice – peace – rendering us in the changes and chances of life steadfast - immovable

5. (vs. 58) In light of the resurrection Paul invites us to abound in the Lord's work. From the passage how would you define the Lord's work?

The Lord's work is delivering the Kingdom of God the Father. How? By destroying every power, every rule, every authority – putting enemies under his feet. In Jesus God is wiping away everything that is destroying his good creation.

6. (vs. 58) In light of the resurrection Paul says such work is not in vain. In other words, in some mysterious way that work will last into the new creation. It will be used by God as the building blocks of His Kingdom. How does that impact your relationship with your work (whether paid or volunteer)?

I will include here a lengthy section from the sermon which may help you in your leadership of the group at this point – to bring them to reflect on their own work. There would be no right or wrong answers here but rather a desire for your group to begin to see their work animated by a vision of the kingdom, a vision of the new creation that has within it an imbedded hope that such work has a place in the new creation, and will be used by God as the building materials of new creation.

From the sermon:

In a very real sense then any work that is animated by a vision of the kingdom – a vision of the new creation – pushing back against the enemies of God’s good creation is the Lord’s work - the artist who yearns for beauty – the lawyer who strives for justice – the health care worker who promotes health – the social worker that puts supports around a family – the educator who is enabling apprehension of truth – any work animated by a vision of the kingdom – a vision of the new creation – pushing back against the enemies of God’s good creation – that is the Lord’s work – and Paul is saying participate in the hope of the resurrection by abounding in such work – for as he concludes - in light of the resurrection that work is not in vain – meaning that this work in some mysterious way will last into the new creation – will be part of God’s building materials for the renewal of all things...

Now such a thought might be new to you – might even be scandalizing to you – but let me put it this way – this will seem like a really odd Segway but bear with me...

The hope of the resurrection led our Christian forebears to very intentional funeral practices - the dead were to be buried and nothing else – they would have been horrified by any other practice - why? Because when Jesus returned those bones would be the raw materials that God would utilize to form our resurrection bodies – something of your material reality now - will remain into eternity.

Now a century ago the western church made a decision due to hygiene and space use to allow for cremation – which I think we can readily understand and in no way limits God’s power to bring about the resurrection of the dead – however in doing so we lost a powerful pointer to the hope of resurrection – God does not wipe away creation to start again – God renews what is already present – uses what already is to form what will be.

How does that relate to your work?

In his book Every Good endeavor – connecting your work to God’s work – Timothy Keller tells a story from the life of J.R.R. Tolkein.

Tolkein was in the midst of writing what would be his greatest work – the Lord of the Rings – he had a glorious vision of what it should be – but just couldn’t make it happen – writers block had set in.

He wrote a short story to reflect on his experience called “Leaf by Niggle”

It’s about an artist, and he’s in a little town. The town had a public building, and they ask Niggle, the artist, to do a mural on the side of the public building. He takes the money, and he begins to work. It goes on for months, and then years. When people walk by, they see all he has done is one little part of the side of the building in which he has drawn a leaf.

It's pretty clear he's trying to draw a tree, but he's just drawn a leaf. They start to berate him, and they say, "What's going on? We spent all this money. It has been a long time. Where's the mural?" He says, "I'm working on it. I just can't quite get it. I'm working on it." Then he dies, and he's on a train to eternity – to new creation. Suddenly, he sees something off in the distance, and he gets off and runs to it. This is what it says he saw.

"Before him stood the Tree, his Tree, finished.... its leaves opening, its branches growing and bending in the wind that Niggle had so often felt or guessed, and had so often failed to catch. He gazed at the Tree – his tree, and slowly he lifted his arms and opened them wide. 'It's a gift!' he said." Here's an artist. He could envision a tree, but he could never get out more than a leaf in his lifetime. But the tree existed. It's there.

In light of this story Keller invites us to see how our work connects to god's work - Let's just say you go into city planning as a young person. Why? You're so excited about cities, and you have a vision of what – a fair city – a beautiful city - a just city ought to be. Unless you understand this, that someday the earth will be filled with the greatest city, the New Jerusalem, and everything about it will be perfect, you're going to be discouraged because throughout your life you're only ever going to get a leaf or a branch done.

Let's say you're a lawyer and you go into law because you have this vision of justice, over your career you're going to be incredibly disillusioned, because you're going to find as much as you're trying to work on those things, so much of what you do is minutia.

Maybe once - twice in your life you feel like you finally got a leaf out. You need to know this. There is a tree. There will be justice – there will be beauty – there will be peace – there will be wholeness – there will be flourishing - Such a hope will affect the way you work, the jobs you take, the money you give, the volunteer roles you inhabit..