

February 6, 2022
Communion

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

“The Good, The Bad and the Hopeful”

Back in the day there was a landmark movie entitled, “The good, the bad and the ugly.” I was never sure how the actor who was called “ugly” felt about it. But it had a great theme song. And really, apart from the fact the Clint Eastwood was in the movie and called, “Good” – all I really remember from the movie is the music. (Whistle)

The strength of this title of course was that not everyone is the same. But I think we can push it even further and say within every person, community, and group we have a mix. No one is completely one thing.

When we explore the passage read for us today it is decidedly a mixed bag. We are drawn to this passage because of the good. The good news that Jesus has died and risen again *to put right what was wrong between us and God*. Paul is passing along what he has learned. He is quoting the common faith of the church. And it is good. (Whistle)

But if we ask why Paul is coming back to this theme in Chapter 15 which he began back in chapter one we encounter some of the bad. (Whistle)

When we encounter mistakes that people of faith have made before us, we do well *not to assume we are better than them...*that we don't wrestle with the same things they did. The bad in this book and passage *is rooted in the lack of awareness* on the part of the Corinthian church that there was a difference between *the culture they had inherited and the call of God in their lives*.

This is an issue for us as well. We dare not assume everything we think we know is in line with the call of God in our lives. But sorting it out is no easy thing. It may be that the hardest part is knowing the sorting needs to happen.

The Corinthians lived in a time when the Philosophical traditions of the age – absorbed just by living in the culture – struggled with the whole notion of resurrection. You have heard people say, *“I think when you die – you are just gone – nothing else happens.”* These are the descendants of many of the residents of Corinth. This made making friends with the story of Jesus difficult. Some people in Corinth were decidedly focused on the spiritual and believed that

Jesus *had a spiritual resurrection* – but that resurrection was limited to him. Still others had drunk deeply of the notion that *physical life is inferior* to spiritual life and any notion of resurrection was absurd.

None of these challenges to the Corinthian church have disappeared in our time. Another challenge for the Corinthian church which we share is *the valuing of winning over losing and power over weakness*. Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried. That is not a prescription for a good public relations campaign. Paul considers himself a slave of Christ – and nobody wanted to be a slave. There was a natural clash between *how the life of Christ played out and what people had learned to value*.

And then there is the ugly. (Whistle) Paul had to fight a lot to be recognized as a legitimate apostle. Earlier in the letter he forcefully asserted his right to claim that title. But here – *he faces the ugly truth*. He did things in his life which were beyond the pale. Things of which he was ashamed. And in this passage Paul faces them – tells the truth about them. (Whistle) But by God's grace does not let them get the upper hand.

In our passage Paul says he is an apostle who is untimely born. This gets at what is being said – *that he shouldn't have survived*. But Paul isn't just saying he was born before expected – a preemie baby - The Greek Paul uses is saying he is like an aborted child for whom there is no expectation he will live. It is a harsh image – it offends our sensibilities – it is as Paul wants. He accepts he has no right to be connected to and serve God in the way he does – but to set it aside would be to ignore the grace he has been given. And that he will not do.

Friends – there are things in our history which are ugly. We worry about things in the future which *could be* ugly. (Whistle) But by the grace of God *we are who we are* – and the grace of God transforms our past, present, and future even as it did Paul's.

Let's be clear, Resurrection doesn't get our old life back. *Resurrection leads to a new and holy adventure after life should have ended*. Because of that, our lives are marked always by the good, the bad and the hopeful. Like Paul, let us hold on to God's grace always – that we may discover God's presence in the Good and the bad and see even the ugly transformed into hope. (Whistle)