1 Corinthians 15:20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

It’s been an interesting month so far. As many of you know, on the 3rd of this month we held the funeral services of our dear member Beth. Now remember, in most cases, many members and I have a 36 year history. We just got settled down from that experience and we are then told that Geraldine, another dear member, is at Marlette in hospice care. I began to make hospice calls on Geraldine. All the while this is going on, my Uncle is in another hospital and we are still not sure if he is going to get better or not. My Mom is clearly weakening and I do kind of expect that at any time now the Lord could call her home. And then comes the death of my friend and fellow Pastor. Turns out Friday the 8th he had fallen on the ice and bumped his head. Since he seemed fine no doctor was consulted. Saturday he had a full day with his family shopping and eating out, but on Sunday morning there are clear signs that something is wrong. Basically twenty minutes after he gets to the hospital he stops responding and 30 minutes later the Neurological Doctor tells the family it is very serious. He had a brain bleed and that bleed has now pushed his brain to the side doing tremendous damage. Did I mention the other dear friend I have whose sister died on Sunday morning? On Monday Steve was pronounced dead! Oh, did I mention that on Monday morning I got the call that Geraldine had also died?

Now I could share with you a few other things going on that most would consider rather stressful and difficult, but you know what they are, well at least one of the things. Add to all of that the weather and needed trips to Saginaw no matter what and again I will just say that February has been an interesting month. Oh, did I mention that I had my 64th birthday at the very beginning? That just seemed a big and ancient number this time. Yep, it has been an interesting month.

A number of people I know, and those people are aware of all of this stuff going on, have asked me, “How are you doing!” My answer is always that same, “I’m fine, I’ve got Jesus on my side.” My fellow Christians just smile and say, “Great!” but there have been a few who just kind of look at me and give an odd stare. You can tell they don’t think I am fine because they usually say something like: “Well, you know I’m here if you need help!” It is a wonderful and deeply appreciated sentiment. But honestly, I am fine!

Would you like to know why I am fine? Would you like to know how I can be confronted by deaths, sicknesses, distresses, peoples’ problems and all the other trappings of my office and profession and still tell you that I am fine? The answer is simple. The answer is Jesus. Let’s consider our theme: **CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!**

There is a wonder and marvel to the words that are before us. The Apostle Paul in writing his letter to the Corinthian congregation is being moved and motivated by the Holy Spirit to write exactly what God knows not only the Corinthians but you and I need to hear. That is something called “verbal inspiration.” In other words, even though Paul wrote this letter, God’s word tells me that what is written here is God’s Word. It is God’s message to people in order that their lives and souls might be instructed, guided and comforted in exactly what God knows we need to know and hear. Verbal Inspiration.

This is important to understand in our faith. If we doubt that the Bible is God’s Word, if we decide that we can pick and choose what to hear or what to believe, that the Bible is not clear or is nothing more than the pious writings of men trying to be godly and trying to make us human animals more than we are, that’s what you get. You get doubt. You are filled with despair and questions. You are constantly in doubt about God and his truth, about living and dying, about good and bad. I can tell you right now, if all of this doubt gets deep enough into your head and heart, you will walk away from God, walk away from his power and promises simply concluding that all of life and living is meaningless and worthless. If that is the case I am going to guess you think life is hard and tough and just about unbearable.

Well, life without the wonder and truth of God is meaningless and worthless, it is hard and tough and just about unbearable. But with the truth and wonder of God life is awesome! It is an adventure we get to live until God calls and brings us home! So how do I know that I have the wonder and truth of God in my life? Because of what our text says: **But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead.**

That statement is so important to grasp and for quite a few reasons. The first reason is this: everything about the Bible, Old Testament to New, is about Jesus. It all testifies to Jesus. In the Old Testament we are told the history of God in promising the Christ. We are told why the Christ needs to come. We are told who He is and what He will do. We are told where He will be born and how. All in all, most Bible scholars believe there are some 450 promises, prophecies about the Christ and his life found in the Old Testament. Now, personally I think there are a lot more than that, but that’s a good number. So when all of those promises come true in the life of Jesus don’t you think that important? What it tells me is that the Old Testament, God’s Word, is faithful and true. So the “born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem, Son of David, Passover lamb, the one who would die and return to life…all of those promises came true in the life of Jesus. The Word of God can be trusted.

The New Testament is about the life of Jesus and how He came and fulfilled all the promises of God found in the Old Testament. The miracles he did, the message he had, the rejection by his own people, betrayed by one of his disciples, crucified, dead and buried. All those things and many more were fulfillments of God’s Word. Fulfillments showing us that God’s Word is true and trustworthy.

Here’s the kicker. Both Old and New Testament hinge upon the resurrection of Jesus. God in his Old Testament told us we would know who the Christ is, who His Son is because His Messiah would suffer, die and then rise from the dead in three days. Jesus himself, told us that is exactly what He intended to do. He was going to fulfill all that God’s Word said of him. For instance, he told his disciples in preparation: **“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”**(Mark 10:33-34)

There it is, the heart and core of Christianity. Jesus is the Christ the Son of God who suffered, died, was buried and rose again from the dead on the third day. As 1 Cor puts it: **But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead!”**

That means all of the New Testament is true. True because Jesus tells us he will rise. True because we are told the Holy Spirit is going to be sent by the Father and risen Son to make sure that we have an accurate and complete record of what we need to know for salvation. So we have resurrection appearances of Jesus for 40 days. We have the spectacle of Pentecost and then in a relatively short time the record of the Apostles and Evangelists of the Christ, the Son of God who came to give eternal life and salvation to all who believe. You’ve heard me say this before, because it is true: When someone tells you they are going to die and then come back to life and they do just that, pay attention! Jesus is worthy of paying attention to.

All because He rose from the dead. That’s right, the lessons of the resurrection come into play here. The resurrection shows us: Jesus is God’s Son. Jesus is our Redeemer. Jesus will raise us from the dead. That’s our faith. We hear and believe this truth about Jesus. That’s what the Holy Spirit tells us as He has the New Testament recorded. For instance in Romans we hear: **Romans 1:1-4** *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God-- 2 the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures 3 regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, 4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.*

And just to hammer this home all the more, on the very day of Pentecost, the first great opportunity for the preaching of Christ you can find these truths in Peter’s sermon that day: **“This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead….God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact…therefore let all Israel be assured of this; God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”**

Jesus is our Savior. The Resurrection is the proof of that. And since Jesus has been raised and since Jesus is the Son of God and since Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to give us the record and infallible truth of God then we can know that all that is proclaimed of Jesus is true! He is our Savior. He has forgiven our sins. He has, of his redemption and love, granted us the gift of heaven and made us heirs of eternal life and salvation. Jesus promises us that when it is time for us to leave this world, our souls, that very thing that makes us, us is going to be with him forever in heaven. It’s not about us. It’s not about being good enough. It’s not about living the right life or doing and saying the right things. It’s not about us being perfect and holy because we can’t do that….it is about the fact that Jesus was perfect and holy for us and Jesus paid for our sins. It is about the fact that all of this is true and factual because Jesus…that’s right, **“has been raised from the dead.”**

Honest to goodness, if God’s goodness just stopped there I would be filled with awe, but it goes even further. God extends to us promises that are just absolutely awesome in and of themselves. For instance, as Jesus was ascending into heaven what was His promise: **And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.”** Jesus promises to be with us and watch over us. The Son of God is by your side and walking with you. Hello! Do you hear this! Jesus is with you!

Or how about this: **And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.** God tells us that he will cause all things to serve us, to ultimately be for our good and salvation. When you read this entire section of Romans 8 it is very clear that God is not just out there, He is working for our good, working for our eternal life and salvation. Seriously, when God is on your side, what is there to worry about?

Another, found in 1 Corinthians 10:13 **No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.** To me this is the greatest promise of God in our earthly lives. God will not put upon us more than we can bear. Mind you, you might think it is more, you might crab and complain, whine and moan…because you are wavering in your trust in the love and marvel of your God. Listen, because of this promise my attitude has always been; Hey, if it is happening, God says I can take it, so let’s get on with it!” He may push you but He will be there to strengthen, comfort and encourage you all the way. He promises this is the way it is. Trust Him, it is true!

And other favorite promise of God that I love to cling to, Heb 12:10: **God disciplines us for our good, that we many share in his holiness.** If God does permit hardship, trial, tribulation, trouble…whatever you want to call it…God says He only does it for your good that the ultimate goal of your holiness be achieved. We are told this discipline may seem unpleasant but it is God lovingly training you in righteousness and peace.

Now you know. Now you know why I can have all kinds of interesting things going on, all kinds of challenges or ups and downs and I am not and will not be overwhelmed. It is because of the wonder of our God. It is because of his promises and the joys and marvels that He pours upon us. It is because His grace love and mercy abounds everywhere I go and everywhere I look. And all of this is true and trustworthy because of one simple but amazing truth: **But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead.** That is what makes it all true. That is my strength, hope and confidence. Jesus is Lord and Savior and for that reason I have nothing to fear and nothing to worry about. Because in Jesus, no matter what, I win. The same in true for you. May God grant you His wonder and marvel because Jesus lives. Amen.