

## **Wake Up and Stand!**

Dear friends in Christ

Our epistle reading for this morning from 1 Corinthians 15:1–20, Paul talks about standing, falling but also waking up.

He begins and ends the text, with an interesting contrast: in verse one he writes: “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand.” (1 Cor. 15:1) Then, in verse 20 he writes: “Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (1 Cor. 15:20) “You stand” and “have fallen asleep.” Both describe Christians—standing and falling—but Paul’s message to us today is that what enables us to stand will be crucial in whether and how we fall.

Earlier Paul had already warned the Christians at Corinth, to “Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (10:12). His concern is that Christians would not fall, fall away from the Gospel that is. “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand.” (v 1). Why does he need to “remind” them? Because they’re forgetting. They’re neglecting the Gospel he preached to them. They’ve been lured away from the basics.

But the Christian at Corinth weren’t contesting or denying the Gospel. No, they’re just setting it off to the side to be accessed on a rainy day so to speak. But that’s dangerous! That’s how forgetting happens. People fall when they fall asleep—either literally fall asleep or just fall asleep at the controls.

Let’s have no dozing and falling onto the electric train tracks. Let’s have no oblivious talking on the cell phone while driving or crossing the street. Let’s not slip on black ice while looking at something else on the street. Falling is not good.

But how do we avoid falling? Simple, it is by being awake. And Paul tells us how Christians are woken from sleep and kept awake. It’s by attending to the basics of the Gospel: “For I delivered to you as of first importance”—first importance, the basics—“what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one

time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me” (vv 3–8). These are the controls of our faith, these are the basics: (1) that Christ died for our sins, (2) that he was buried, (3) that he rose from the dead, and (4) perhaps best of all, that he appeared.

Jesus really did die with a body just like yours, and he did it for your sins. Those who buried him really did put his body into a hole in hard stone. That very same body did rise. This is most certainly true! Well true for those who believe, but for the rest of the world, it sounds too good to be true. All is well and good but could easily be the result of a well imagined myth except for these two facts: (1) this all happened according to the Scriptures, and (2) he appeared to a lot of people on several occasions. There were witnesses. This would hold up in a court of law. You can stand on it.

This is what we confess in our creed, in the Apostles Creed. And as you heard the epistle being read, chances are you thought of the Creed. That’s because the first few verses of our reading are contained in the creed. That’s why we say the Creed often, and that’s why we study it. We do so because it reminds of the basics and, in so doing, we stand. The basics are what you need to stand.

Yes, yes, we know all that. We know the basics. Know the Creed. We even hear this reading every Easter. So why again we hear this reading today? Well, maybe because at times we just might mumble through the Creed. Maybe we do so as we are napping at the controls so to speak and so we miss the basics, the basics of Christ dying and rising for us. But when we do that, we do fall asleep. You think you can stand?

Where can this go? “Some of you [in Corinth] say that there is no resurrection of the dead” (v 12). But there is a high cost for that. You might want to think twice about this. As you see, if there is no resurrection from the dead, then Christ did not rise, and if he didn’t rise you have trusted our preaching, which would be false because we have been preaching that Christ did rise from the dead! Do you see the dilemma? Even worse, your faith would be misplaced and you would still be in your sins. And what about your loved ones who have “fallen asleep” in Christ? “Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished,” Paul says (v 18). What hope would there be for them?

The capstone of Paul's argument is that this church business is just silly if Christ did not rise. Then we would become just a club, or worse, a cult. He says it this way: "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied" (v 19). What's left if Christ didn't rise? Just some nice sentiment, some do-gooding, and some virtue signaling, some cultic practice that procures and demands from us blind allegiance. Yuck! Remember, we have one driving concern here, and that is that we and our loved ones who have fallen asleep in Christ will be raised from the dead too.

Oh, and by the way, even as Paul was scolding the Corinthians—which he had to do a lot—he could not hold back the hope. Yes there is hope in our reading, "Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (v 18)? You see, if you're asleep, you'll wake up. Jesus' disciples made that point once, when their friend Lazarus had died (Jn 11:12). In fact we all, absolutely all will come back to life, but some to live with Christ for ever, but others for total darkness in hell. And that is what Paul reminds us of in our reading today: "In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." That in Christ we resurrect for life everlasting.

See, the basics—Christ's very real death and burial for our sins, his very real resurrection, his letting us know how real they are by appearing to so many people—those basics are what we need to stand. And if we stand, we will someday fall asleep in Christ. And when you fall asleep in Christ, you wake up in Christ and you stand in Christ forever, never to fall.

Jesus gives us those basics in abundance. Read God's words, say the Creed often, meditate, digest, stand on those words. That in them you are reminded who you are, who God is, who Christ is and what he does for you, he came to die for your sins, and to give you eternal life, in the flesh, with God forever.

"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Then stand in the "the gospel...which you received, in which you stand, <sup>2</sup> and by which you are being saved."

In his name, amen.