

9.1.2019 Trinity 11 (1 Corinthians 15:1-11)

The Gospel according to St. John records the account of Jesus healing a man who was born blind. You probably remember this story, and the way it describes Jesus spitting on the ground, making some mud, rubbing it on the man's eyes, and then telling him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. The man does what Jesus tells him to do, and returns with his sight. When the people, who live in community with him, who know that he was born blind, witness this miracle, they bring him to the Pharisees who want to investigate this miraculous healing. The Pharisees ask the man how he's received his sight, and he tells them that Jesus *"put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see."* The Pharisees refuse to believe his story, and so they ask his parents, *"Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? So how is it that he can now see?"* His parents answered, *"We know he is our son, and we know he was born blind. But how he can now see or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him. He is old enough to speak for himself."* So a second time they called for the man who had been blind and told him to *"Give glory to God! We know that this Man (Jesus) is a sinner."* To which the man who had been healed answered, *"Whether He is a sinner I do not know. There is one thing I do know: I was blind, but now I see!"* (John 9:1-25).

As intelligent, powerful, and clever as they were, the Pharisees could not undermine the simple truth. When you consider this man's testimony, the way his parents verified the basic facts, and the many people who lived in community with this man and witnessed this miracle, you see the value of a credible eye witness. In the book of Deuteronomy (19:15) we read, *"In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established."* Yet, in our Epistle this morning, St. Paul moves beyond two or three, and stands on the testimony of hundreds of witnesses as he declares the Gospel to the Corinthians, and to the world the Father gave the life of His Son to save. These are his inspired words, *"Brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you,*

*unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, He was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time” (1 Corinthians 15:1-8).*

So, if the Bible states that only two or three witnesses are necessary to establish a fact, why do you think St. Paul finds it necessary to pull out the heavy artillery, to hit us with hundreds of witnesses instead of two or three, and leave absolutely no doubt about the truth of his words? I would suggest Paul offers such overwhelming, incontrovertible evidence because apart from these historical facts we have nothing but wishful thinking. As Paul writes in the verses that follow our reading, *“If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins”* (1 Corinthians 15:17 NLT). Our faith, our hope, everything we believe is built on the fact that our Lord and God was crucified, dead, and buried; and on the third day He rose again. The foundation of the Christian faith is not good works or moral teaching, the foundation of our faith is the precious death and glorious resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We have nothing apart from these facts.

So, thanks be to God, for we know that our Redeemer lives (Job 19:25). The Gospel has been declared unto us by many witnesses, and though there is so much these witnesses don't know about the Infinite, Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, there is one thing they do know: *I was blind, but now I see!* The Gospel message is that simple. As you know, theologians write books, series of books, even large collections of books about theology and the Gospel, but they are mostly writing at an academic level, and often on theoretical material that the Church has spent centuries discussing. It is true that such books are good and useful and necessary, but the Gospel is so much

simpler than all of that. The Gospel is not some theory or complex set of theological principles that requires years of study to understand. The Gospel is a simple truth.

Yes, there are many times when we read and re-read the words of St. Paul, because as Peter said (2 Peter 3:16), Paul can be “*hard to understand,*” but that’s not true about what we heard him say today. This morning we heard him declare unto us the Gospel by which we are saved, and he said simply, “*that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures...*” When a man like St. Paul, who can easily put together a very complex argument to defend the truth of his words, makes it so simple, it should make us stop and really consider what he’s saying.

Paul tells us here that Jesus Christ, with all the truths and doctrines that this title “Christ” carries with it (God’s Anointed One, the Chosen Savior, the King of Kings), it was He who died for our sins. This is not about philosophy or complex theology, but about sacrifice, a freely-given sacrifice for us. Someone died for what we’ve done. Someone died to rescue us, and that Someone was God’s own Son, the Person of Jesus Christ. Paul writes that Christ died “*according to the Scriptures.*” He died just as the Scriptures of the Old Testament prophesied that He would, and not only did He die, our Lord was buried, just like any dead person would be. Then three days after His death and burial, Paul tells us that He rose from the grave just as the Old Testament promised that the Messiah would.

After declaring the Gospel, Paul doesn’t expect people to just take his word for it, he points to hundreds of witnesses, most of whom were still alive. As he writes this letter to the Corinthians, he’s saying, “These are the facts. If you don’t believe me, go ask any one of these many witnesses.” Most of these people he refers to could be called to testify to the truth of Paul’s words, just like the man born blind, his parents, and neighbors could testify to his miraculous healing. It’s difficult to discount the simple truth spoken by a credible eye witness, especially when that witness is just the first in a line of

a great multitude of witnesses that are ready to confirm the details.

The details, the simple truth, the foundation of our faith, the historical fact  
*“that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures...”*

This is our hope and the Gospel we believe, *“by which also ye are saved,”* and that salvation means that we too shall rise from the dead, from our own graves, and shall live forever with Him. Paul makes this simple enough for a child to understand and that’s how the Gospel is meant to be understood, for Jesus said, *“Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein”* (Mark 10:15).

Our Epistle today reminds us that the Gospel is a simple truth, grounded in historical facts, verified by credible eye witnesses. It’s crucial that we keep these things in mind, because the world, the flesh, the devil, and the culture in which we live will attempt to twist, complicate, and undermine the facts of our faith. My friends, there is so much I don’t know, so many mysteries that we cannot know because God has not chosen to reveal them, but ask me about the Gospel and I’ll respond like a blind man who Jesus touched with His hands, a man who then went and did what Jesus told Him to do, for *“there is one thing I do know: I was blind, but now I see!”*