1 Corinthians 15:20 20But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead.

I am shocked! Okay, at first I was. Then I just acknowledged in my head the absolute shrewdness of what I saw. Let me explain. The words of this text are some of the most important words to be found in God’s Word. For a long time, for many Christians the violation of these words was always a clear indication of the fact that whoever denied them was no longer a Christian. The text makes that clear. But here is what I found.

I went to quite a few of the major denomination websites to look for their statement of faith on the issue of the resurrection of Jesus. Let me share with you one such statement of faith that I found. Again, all I will tell you is that this statement was taken from the website of a major Christian denomination. Here is the one statement I found on the issue of resurrection.

*What exactly do we believe about resurrection? Or, put more directly, what is resurrection?*

*It is important to begin with what resurrection is not. Resurrection is not the resuscitation of a person who had previously died. Resurrection is not like zombies pushing their way out of graves and tombs and roaming the streets in hordes. Resurrection does not make people or bodies “undead.”*

*Resurrection makes people truly, fully and completely alive.*

*In 1 Corinthians 15, the most extensive discussion of the traits of resurrection in the New Testament, Paul indicates resurrection does not result in the mere reviving of the physical body that was buried, but rather a spiritual body. While this newly created spiritual body is still “us” in some way, ultimately it is very different and full of far greater potential than what came before.*

Please note what that statement actually says. When read carefully, although there is a line that says “Resurrection makes people truly, fully and completely alive” you then have to ask what they mean by that. Because in the very next paragraph it is made clear that to them, based on their reading of 1 Corinthians 15, the resurrection is “a spiritual body.” Make no mistake. It is cleverly written. In truth, this church body denies and rejects what God’s Word clearly states, that Jesus was physically and actually raised from the dead. They do not believe in an actual and physical resurrection.

That should shock you! But what I found even more shocking is how much more clever the deniers of the resurrection of Jesus have become. In actuality I checked 5 other websites of mainstream churches. In one of those cases, the website spoke of the “resurrection of Jesus” but not once did they define or make clear what they meant or understood by the phrase. Yet I can tell you that as little as three years ago I had been on their website and at that time it was quite clear that they did not believe in an actual and physical resurrection of Jesus. For that matter, this main denomination made it clear that they didn’t even believe in an actual afterlife but rather that our calling as Christians was to make our mark and be remembered in this life. It was shocking to read all that stuff then, but it was more shocking to see how they cover up that they clearly deny God’s Word.

The other four denominations that I looked at were just as shocking. Again, I know that theologically these four denominations in the past have had clear statements where they in a wordy and clever way denied the resurrection of Jesus. This time, not a one of those four even had a statement of belief concerning the resurrection. Seriously, here is this cornerstone doctrine of God’s Word and they don’t say a thing about it. All sorts of other beliefs on trendy things but not a word about the resurrection of Jesus. I have to tell you it was absolutely shocking to me.

It was shocking because I now realize how deceptive and how, should I say it, “shadowy” these churches have become in sharing what they teach. I hope and pray they had to do this because it was clear that to not teach the resurrection of Jesus from the dead must have had an impact on their membership. Yet note they don’t really change anything, they just hide the truth and then show you how absolutely trendy they are for the world today. And yes, it is trendy to undermine the truth of God’s Word.

Well, here at St. Paul Lutheran Church and in the WELS, I can tell you there is no problem with teaching and preaching the actual and physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We recognize it as a central doctrine. We recognize it as the very pinnacle of our faith. We do indeed grasp that to even suggest that if nothing physical happened on Easter morning then we have nothing to preach and teach worth even a wooden nickel. Our theme for today will be: **CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED.**

Now, because I don’t want any confusion or doubt as to what we are speaking of, let’s just back up for a moment. We have been hearing about this son born to a young woman named Mary. It truth, it is God’s son and the woman that gave birth was actually a virgin. It was a miraculous birth that clearly proclaimed that God was on the move and that God was working to bring about the promises of eternal life and salvation. Do we not hear the echo of the angels in our ears: **“He is Christ, the Lord!”**

We have also been hearing about the man Jesus and how he began a ministry among his people. That ministry was unique and awesome. Jesus did miracles. Not just a few, not even just a hundred, but in truth, Jesus did thousands of miracles among the Jewish people so that they could clearly grasp that He was the Christ, the promised Son of God and the Messiah that had been promised. You see, that was one of the signs of the Messiah. Isaiah foretold in chapter 35, **“Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unplugged. The crippled will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute shout for joy.”** That’s what Jesus did, he systematically began to fulfill all the various prophecies of the Lord concerning the Savior who would come.

But seriously, that was still not the biggest and most important of the prophecies to be fulfilled. There was one big one, uttered by a few prophets, that was of utmost importance. Again I will use Isaiah’s words because they give the best picture. You know the words. In part they say, **“He was despised and rejected by men…he was taking up our weaknesses, and he was carrying our afflictions…he was stricken, smitten, and afflicted, but it was because of our rebellion that he was pierced…the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed…he was taken away without fair trial and without justice, and of his generation, who even cared? So he was cut off from the land of the living…they would assign him a grave with the wicked, but he was given a grave with the rich in his death…Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush hm.”** HERE IS THE BIG PART. **“Because you made his life a guilt offering, he will see offspring. He will prolong his days, and the Lord’s gracious plan will succeed in his hand. After his soul experiences anguish, he will see the light of life. He will provide satisfaction.”**

There it is. Can you read those words of Isaiah and not see the passion of Jesus foreshadowed, at times clearly pictured. You can see his death by false trial and worthless accusation. He was stricken, smitten, and afflicted…You can just hear Jesus cry out, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!”** He was crucified with the lowly criminal and yet Jesus was buried in a rich man’s tomb. But Jesus does not stay dead. Just as God had promised here, and as was foreshadowed in Jonah’s life, on the third day Jesus rises. He returns to life. Not an apparition, not some mystical psychological wish the disciples made up, and not some other form of trickery and deceit Jesus’ followers perpetrated so they could become exalted and important in life. Jesus, truly, clearly, physically in flesh, bone and blood returned to life. For the next forty days Jesus appeared to not a few, but to thousands to clearly show he was alive. Because it is the knowledge, the testimony of those thousands that brought so many to believe. To believe so fiercely that when persecution erupted they would rather die than deny that Jesus Christ is God and Lord of all. Even all of history agrees that such martyrdom does not occur without the advent of the absolutely marvelous. For if this history and truth is not of God it would not be.

Of course, I will tell you that Satan has been busy. Satan has worked hard to get the world and yes, even the many denominations of Christianity to today deny and explain away what Jesus is about. Seriously, if you knew what was being taught in the name of Jesus in so many of today’s churches I would hope you would be appalled. Because what a sad thing, that despite the clear words of the Lord our God and the clear testimony of eyewitnesses and the Holy Spirit working, many people no longer believe and hold fast to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

And what does Paul, writing under the power of the Holy Spirit say? **“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.”** A denial of the resurrection, of the clear accounts of God’s Word that Jesus had risen, physically and truly risen back to life, means your faith is worthless. There is no Savior. There is no reason for Church. There is no truth in the Bible. There is no reason for Christmas. There is no reason for hope or comfort or to even imagine that somewhere out there is some sort of deity who will listen to your prayerful rantings and ravings. Make no mistake. The Apostle makes it clear that such is the end result of denying that Jesus lives!

Might I remind you that Paul, perhaps a young man when Jesus went to the cross was later in life to see the Lord Jesus and have his life changed. Paul was known as Saul. He was a persecutor, a hater of the followers of Jesus, an up and coming instrument of the Jews who worked at destroying the teachings and proclamations of Jesus by destroying his followers. And then Jesus appeared to him. Clearly and powerfully Jesus appeared and helped Saul grasp what a fool, what a godless man he was to work against Him. And Saul’s life was changed. He became, because of the living Jesus, Paul, the teacher, the apostle, the evangelist of Jesus. And Paul died with the name and hope of Jesus on his lips.

Or should we ignore the very words of Peter on the day of Pentecost! Yes, the same Peter found hiding and fearful even a week after the events of the resurrection is now the Peter standing amidst the crowds in Jerusalem proclaiming Jesus. And what did he say?

Acts 2:23ff. **“Men of Israel, hear these words! Jesus the Nazarene was a man recommended to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know. This man, who was handed over by God’s set plan and foreknowledge, you killed by having lawless men nail him to a cross. He is the one God raised up by freeing him from the agony of death, because death was not able to hold him in its grip. Indeed, David says concerning him: ‘I saw the Lord always before me, because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my tongue rejoiced. My flesh also will rest in hope, because you will not abandon my life to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life. You will fill me with joy in your presence. Gentlemen, brothers, I can speak confidently to you about the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath that he would seat one of his descendants on his throne, he saw what was coming and spoke about the resurrection of Christ, saying that he was neither abandoned to the grave nor did his flesh see decay. This Jesus is the one God has raised up. We are all witnesses of that. So, after he was exalted to the right hand of God and after he received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father, he poured out what you are now seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into heaven, and yet he says: The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool under your feet.’ Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’”**

It is clear that Peter affirms and proclaims that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Not an apparition, not a pious wish, not a deceptive hope, but actually and truly rose from the dead to live and rule forever as Lord and Christ. Was Peter deceived or was Peter impacted by what he saw and knew to be absolutely true of Jesus?

Or again, let’s turn to the words found in the book of Romans 1:3-4 **“This gospel is about his Son—who in the flesh was born a descendant of David, who in the spirit of holiness was declared to be God’s powerful Son by his resurrection from the dead—Jesus Christ, our Lord.”**

So here is what I want you to know. Jesus has been raised from the dead. Jesus is our Lord and Savior from sin and in Jesus we have the promise of eternal life and salvation because God has done this great thing. Christ has been raised. And when I say Christ I mean the man Jesus has been raised and in this resurrection the sure hope, comfort and confidence of eternal life is ours in Jesus through faith.

Please let no one deceive you. Jesus is what it is all about. Please know that Jesus lives and believe. Amen.