

Like most of you, Julie and I are hunkered down in our home. We are keeping a distance from everyone but each other. And we are both working remotely from home. I'm sitting at the kitchen table doing my thing, and Julie is in the spare bedroom doing a Zoom call with her kindergartners. I hear her leading her kids in a song called "Fried Ham." This virus has changed all of our lives.

But God's grace has provided us silver linings in all of this too. Our prayers have deepened, our scripture reading is more energized, relationships are no longer taken for granted; our compassion for the needs around us has grown. We are getting to know our neighbors—rays of light that pierce the darkness.

And it's obviously changed the methods for doing church at CPC. In fact, today, and we had a baptism planned on our patio on our Foster City Campus. But we haven't yet figured out how to do baptisms virtually.

This virus has changed our lives. A tiny virus has shattered the popular belief in our culture that human beings are so advanced, capable, self-sufficient, and prepared in a matter of a few short weeks. The images of empty roads, empty stores, and full hospitals will stick with us forever. We will never forget these days.

It's like a giant bad news switch was flipped in our world, and the darkest and most troubling feelings people can have were let loose. Take your pick: Fear, anxiety, anger, exhaustion, sadness, and uncertainty about our future and the future of our loved ones seem to rule the day.

In our culture, we have held dear to the notion, especially here in the bay area, that a person with the right education, hard work, and the smart accumulation of wealth can buy and control their own destiny. This virus exposed the theory of self-sufficiency as a delusion. Having our delusions exposed is a painful thing. But having our delusions exposed is also a good thing. It opens us up to look in new places for answers to life's ultimate questions.

This coronavirus compels us to look hard for good news that brings hope. It compels us to look for good guidance on where to find solid ground on which to stand. The coronavirus compels us to look for something to calm the storm that is swirling around us these days. And in our passage, we are going to see some good news. Plus, we will get some good guidance.

This message will complete our equipping series called Making a Move. Over the past few weeks, we have been taught from the scriptures that all followers of Christ are called to be priests.

Every one of us is called to get equipped and discover our spiritual gifts. Every one of us is called to serve both inside and outside the walls of this church. And every one of us is called to practice loving one another. Last week, we learned that we are all called to be his witnesses and share our stories about the hope that is in us because Jesus is in our lives.

We end this series with some very good news, and some very good guidance to equip us for the times in which we live right now. This good news comes from the Apostle Paul, and it's found in his first letter to the church in the city of Corinth. It's in 1 Corinthians 15. So, let's fight back against the bad news and flip on the good news switch.

Chapter 15 is full of good news, and I want to highlight a couple of things. First, in verse 3, Paul says this, "*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures*" (1 Cor. 15:3). When we think of this coronavirus pandemic, it should remind us that there is a greater, darker, and more dangerous pandemic floating around out there. It's called Sin. Not everyone will test positive for the coronavirus, but everyone has tested positive for the infection of sin. Sin is more destructive than the coronavirus will ever be, but the good news is there is a known cure.

Here is the cure, and it is more good news. Paul continues, "*that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures*" (v. 4). Before this virus, most of us didn't wake up every day wondering who might we know who is sick and who might we know who is dying. But these times have caused our minds to go there. One day my life and your life on earth will end. One of these days, I am going to die, and you are going to die. But the good news is that Jesus Christ also died. And Paul says he was buried, but on the third day, he rose from the dead.

So first, Christ died for our sins. And second, he rose again, and he lives. And the third part of the gospel that completes this greatest news ever is that even though we die, we are going to live. No matter what happens on earth, I'm going to live! You're going to live! Our lives will not end in a cemetery or an urn. Christ died. Christ lives. We will die. We will live. This world is not the end of our story. Believers in Christ don't have to fear death. Let me skip down to verses 55-57. Some call these beautiful words, Paul's song.

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the

power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

The Good News is that we are going to live

Now, this good news raises a question for us all. How is it going to change the way we live today? In other words, what are we going to do with this good news? Paul's reminder of the good news is not the end of his sermon. In verses 1-57, Paul is saying, "Thanks be to God because sin, death and the devil have been defeated, and this is the greatest news anyone could ever receive." And now in verse 58, the final verse of chapter 15, he is saying, "Let me guide you. Let me equip you. This good news can make a difference in your life today." In other words, this good news ought to cause something wonderful to happen in us. This good news should change how we think, speak, and live in the following ways. Let me read verse 58.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. 1 Cor. 15: 58

Paul is being very pastoral here, and we all need to be pastored in these times. The believers in Corinth were, in large part immature. They lived in a worldly city and were easily pulled into worldly thinking. And when Paul set them straight, they didn't receive it well. They were enticed by the idols of their age and had lost their grounding in the truth. But he refers to them with a heart full of love and affection.

Stand firm. Let nothing move you.

Paul equips them and us by detailing a new lifestyle. It's a lifestyle of unusual stability of being settled. The best translation is to be steadfast. The word "be" in the original language means that the steadfastness didn't exist prior to Jesus. After Jesus' resurrection, the power to be steadfast comes into existence. I'll say it this way: Because we are going to live, we can be steadfast.

"Let nothing move you" carries the same basic idea but with more intensity. Paul is saying, "Stay immobile; stay motionless." Where is the place for us to settle - to stay motionless, and unswayed? In God's Will.

This can happen for us because if we have grounded our hope in the resurrection, we don't have to be rattled by the winds that swirl around us, or the storms that might otherwise swamp us. Today, winds and storms fill our airwaves. We are naturally drawn into the negative news and the scary projections. We are naturally unsettled as circumstances make things seem very uncertain for us. There is a pull toward very dark places. That pull is strong, and we need to stay tethered to the good news. We are in the middle of some harsh realities of life in this fallen world right now.

And I want all of you to know, especially in our church family who are feeling very alone and frightened right now, your greatest friend, your sweetest companion is Jesus. He is right there with you right now. Jesus doesn't practice social distancing between you and him. He doesn't wear a mask. He breathes life into you. He draws near to those who are lonely and brokenhearted in times like these. You and I have reason to stand. We do not need to give way to fear and doubt. Paul's argument in chapter 15 is that our God is faithful to everything he has promised. And that he has the power to deliver everything he has promised.

Give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord

The idea is that because we are going to live, that powerful and liberating reality should compel us to change whatever we need to change so we can give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord. In the original language, the words "give yourselves fully" best translates to "Always abounding in work for the Lord."

The word always means at all times, perpetually, and continuously. The word abounding refers to going over the top to serve in excess. It's the idea of exceeding the requirements and was used to speak of a swollen river that was so full; it was overflowing its banks.

I am so encouraged to see the abounding work of the Lord happening through CPCers. Equipped CPCers are taking their love to the frontlines of this pandemic to offer love to the medical staffs who we pray for. If you go to our website and click on COVID-19 Updates, Ways to Help (<https://cpc.org/ways-to-serve-in-covid19>), you will see something called Medical Worker Meal Train along with other opportunities to serve our community during COVID-19.

CPCers are banding together and providing meals to medical personnel, who at great personal risk are fighting this disease. Maybe you have seen it. Maybe you have heard it from a loved one fighting on the front lines of this thing. I know I hear it from my daughter, who serves in a hospital. At the beginning of their shifts, they walk into the battle, not knowing what they will face or what might happen to them as they do their duty.

So how do I turn everything I do into the work of the Lord? Here is an answer: If we believe the good news that we are going to live, then the work we do while on this planet should be shaped by that promise. If I am giving myself fully to the work of the Lord, I will be enthusiastic, hopeful, motivated, and looking for ways to help while listening to the leadings of the Holy Spirit. I will trust that God is working in and through all I do, and who I bring alongside to do the work with me.

Paul is encouraging us to believe that good things will happen when we give ourselves fully. He is saying, "Believe in victory. Believe that a life arranged around Jesus is an abundant life. Believe in spiritual transformation. Believe in deliverance." Paul is saying, "Jesus died. And now Jesus is alive. And therefore, we

will live, so don't settle." People who were once fearful can know courage. People who were once depressed can rise and live with joy again.

There are two kinds of death. One is the kind of death when our hearts stop beating. Paul says not to be afraid of physical death. The other kind of death is dying to self. Paul is saying, don't be afraid of dying to self. But that giving of ourselves fully means that we are to constantly die to our pride, die to our own agenda, and die to our sense of control. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Don't be afraid.

Know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain

Even though the labor is hard and exhausting, our labor is not in vain. Everything we do and are getting equipped to do is not in vain. And even though you might be saying, "I am working so hard, and I am just not seeing any fruit." Paul is saying, "Your labor is not in vain."

Every good work that God allows us to do in this life may not reveal fruit to us. But there comes a promise that every good work on earth has eternal benefits the Lord himself guarantees. So everything God calls us to has meaning and purpose. Because of the resurrection, our life and our labor are not in vain.

Why does God have Paul remind us of this? Because God knows of our times. Nothing surprises him. And he knows our hearts. He knows we live and labor in a fallen world with other fallen people, and he knows that can be very discouraging. And he knows we are prone to wander and forget that Jesus lived. Jesus died. And therefore, we will live forever. So even in the dark nights, when we are discouraged, we can remember the hope we have in the gospel.

I love this wisdom from Jesus on this point. He told this story found in Luke 14.

"But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."
Luke 14:13-14.

He is saying, "Don't invite those who can repay you in this life. Don't even give a thought to some kind of reward in this life when you serve." Maybe God will give you a blessing that you can experience this side of heaven, but maybe not. Just don't expect it in this life. And don't let a lack of thanks or recognition from others stop you from laboring.

Some of you may know that in the past month, my dad's health has been failing. At 89, his mind and body continued to weaken. I was able to see him in Colorado a few weeks ago. My sister, who lives by him, called me on Tuesday to tell me that they had gotten him up and dressed as usual. They lifted him into his wheelchair and wheeled him down for breakfast. It started out a day, just

like any other day. Then something changed. During breakfast, he slumped over and became non-responsive to the nurses.

My sister was able to see him, and she held the phone up to his ear in his room so I could talk to him. He was able to hear me and indicated that by squeezing my sister's hand. We read some scripture and prayed. Thursday night, my dad passed peacefully into the presence of Jesus. I think about the new chapter for my dad in heaven, and I think about what Jesus said here.

One day, along with my dad, each one of us will find ourselves standing before Jesus face to face. One day our failing physical bodies from this fallen world will be replaced with immortal, glorified bodies. One day our weak hearts subject to all kinds of temptations will be completely transformed and reflect all that is righteous and good. One day we will find ourselves in a home in a kingdom beyond our imagination. And one would think enough! Thank you, Lord!

But here we see that the Lord promises something more. On top of all that, one day, there will be this grand event in heaven. We will have the opportunity to be rewarded in heaven for all the work for the Lord we did on earth that seems to us right now to be done in vain.

Every one of us will have the opportunity to stand before Jesus and hear his voice. "Well done, good and faithful servant." Don't ever forget. Our lives are an investment in the future. To hear him say, "I know no one else saw your abounding work, But I saw it!"

And standing before Jesus, we will look back and thank God he equipped us to stand firm. Let nothing move us. Give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord. Know that our labor in the Lord is not in vain

One question to think about and discuss. How can the Good News of Jesus and the good guidance from Paul change the way we think, speak, and live in these difficult days?

I'll conclude with this final exhortation from Paul. "*Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*" (Gal. 6:9). God bless you with His promises. And may God exhort you to give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail,
please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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