*Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to thee, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly thine, utterly dedicated unto thee; and then use us, we pray thee, as thou wilt, and always to thy glory and the welfare of thy people; In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

A couple of weeks ago, I told you about how the Church in the ancient city of Corinth was having a lot of trouble. They were in so much trouble, that the local leaders couldn't keep the peace anymore and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles himself had to intervene. I told you that they had begun to abandon the original teaching they had heard, the proclamation that had called them all together in the first place. I told you about how in their pride they had ceased to seek after the gift of Godly love to keep them bound together for common mission. It was a community that had lost its way, becoming more and more like another Corinthian social club rather than an outpost of the Kingdom of God's only begotten Son. That ancient church was in real danger of devolving into just a bunch of people meeting in a building. Which can be nice, unless of course, it's not.

Paul was desperate to convince the Corinthians of their error, hoping against all hopes that they would open their hearts back up to the message of the Crucified and Risen Jesus. Not just because he loved being right (though I think Paul really did love winning an argument) but because Paul was deeply convinced that the truth behind the proclamation of Jesus Christ was so important, so critical to Christian identity and vocation, that it was worth defending and reiterating. Paul, like countless Christians before and after him, trusted that Christ's rising on the first Easter was the most transformative event in human history. In fact, its only rival may have been humanity's creation itself. Christ's resurrection from the dead was an event that would begin a complete reordering of the entire cosmos, the universe itself, where the moans and groans of material creation itself would become yet again songs of praises to God. Paul saw the resurrection of Jesus from the dead as the proof of his Messianic identity, the fulcrum of God's recreative agenda for the universe, and therefore God's deep desire to win back humanity from the trap of sin and death. Thus, Paul pleaded with the Corinthians to recall their life won for them by Christ by his cross and passion.

But many in that old Church had come to figure that a resurrection of the dead was nonsense. Dead things don't stop being dead, they likely reasoned. There is too great a gulf between life and death, they must have thought, that even God could not bridge such a chasm. They weren't alone in Corinth for thinking like that, and certainly weren't alone in the ancient world. Even among Jesus' neighbors in first century Israel, there was a group that rejected the idea of resurrection outright; you might remember his opponents the Sadducees. Paul would have absolutely none of it. If Christ has been resurrected, if Christ lives, then all who participate in his life will also be raised to new life. It is not a question of God's power over death, for Paul that is absolute. It's not even a question as to whether the new life of the resurrection makes rational sense; other than pointing out that fact that it is nonsensical to try to do faith and the Church without it in view. Paul revealed his hand early in the letter, all the way back in the first few lines when he told his friends that

"The message of the cross is foolishness to the perishing, but to those being saved it is the power of God."

I see it like this: that God's power to raise Jesus from the dead is not something that overrides the intellect but shows that God's power over the primal forces of the universe surpasses even our wildest imaginations; even our best works of rational logic.

Which means that all sorts of wild things are completely possible. And I think that's where Jesus' stunning lesson as recorded in St. Luke's account of the Gospel really starts to make sense. Though it seems a bit out of order in terms of how the narrative unfolded, it is true nonetheless that if the means of Jesus' exaltation was the humiliating cross on calvary, then it might as well be true that the poor, the hungry, the weeping, and the persecuted would be blessed by God. The people who gathered around Jesus to receive healing had a fairly unique opportunity to experience God's desire for restoration close at hand. Even still, I suspect they would have been pretty confused by this sermon on the plain. It would not be obvious that poor people are blessed. It would seem much more likely that the rich and those with plenty have the full favor of the Divine. But notice that Jesus looks to his disciples, his closest students, when he offers his blessings and woes. It is to them that a new world is becoming more manifest, to them that the Kingdom of a Risen Christ would be revealed, they would be the first to reach out to the world around them with the news that God's power and blessedness was available to a lot more people than anyone had ever expected. Once again, humanity's understanding would be surpassed by God's power.

So if the resurrection of Christ is such an important event that it even allows for the poor, hungry, weeping, and persecuted to be blessed, and acts as a clarion call to the rich, full, and laughing who may have thought they had it all figured out on their own, I wonder what God's power for eternal life might mean for us today. I've been talking about Christ's resurrection and its relationship to the universe; I suspect that most of us aren't thinking about the spheres wheeling around us when we get up for work in the morning. We are a rather small part of the universe, but we do enjoy the power of God just the same. Know that the same God who is at work bringing all things in heaven and earth back under the Lordship of Christ is the same God who seeks to bring you new life. It can manifest in obvious ways; you've heard me talk about my own story before and how were it not for the power of God I certainly wouldn't be up here speaking to you wearing multiple robes. But it can also manifest in less obvious ways: the gentle tug towards reconciling with the person or people you can't stand. Or perhaps you might experience the warming hand of the Spirit's comfort when things don't seem to have any hope of getting better. I believe, with Paul, that God's power over sin and death, the world, the flesh, and the devil, is absolute and His desire for our flourishing with his light and love is exactly what we are meant to encounter in our ministry together, and what we are meant to proclaim to the ends of the earth. In reflecting this week on the God's life-giving power, let us recall even the second verse of the first Psalm this week:

As we delight in the law of the Lord, \*

and meditate *on* his law day and night.

To God be all glory. Amen.