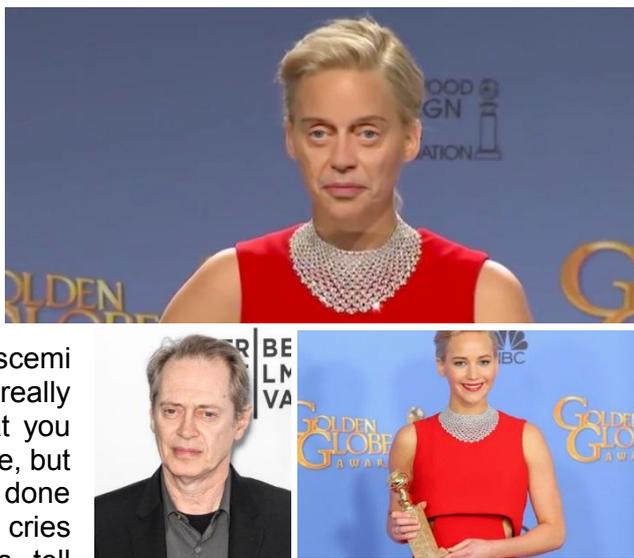


1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-20
FOR THIS LIFE ONLY...?

The picture opposite hit the social media headlines in the last ten days. Is it a real picture? It looks like a woman giving a speech. Actually, it is a video in which this person is heard to speak thanking people for her award at the Golden Globes film awards. But all is not what it seems! It started out as a film of the actress Jennifer Lawrence giving her acceptance speech, but someone has used a piece of clever technology to put the face of actor Steve Buscemi onto that image of Jennifer Lawrence who really was making the speech; it is so good that you can't see join. You can't tell that this is a fake, but someone has told the world what they have done and it is called "Deep Fake". "Fake News" cries Donald Trump when the news agencies tell stories that he doesn't like, stories that are true; but here's the other side of that technology in something that looks true and good, but is in fact fake. The scary thing about this technology is that we can now make anybody appear to say anything we want them to say if we know how to use this technology.



How easy do you find it to believe the resurrection? From the very beginning, there have been people who have said that the resurrection is fake. Some have said that Jesus didn't really die, that He only fainted on the cross and then revived in the cool of the tomb and that He then pushed the stone away to escape. Others said that someone stole His body to make it look like resurrection, but that it never happened. Others said that the soldiers hid the body just in case someone claimed resurrection, but they never produced it! Some said that the disciples made up these stories of Jesus' appearances, as some kind of mass hysteria hallucination because they wanted to believe it and they persuaded themselves to see something that was never there. So, they say, the whole thing is just a fake made up to help people through a tough time because they lost Jesus whom they loved dearly.

None of these claims stack up. The tomb is empty and there is no reasonable explanation for that other than resurrection. Some people, either already living in Corinth or who had arrived in Corinth, were saying "there is no resurrection; people don't rise from dead." People still say that! It is hard to believe resurrection because we think it just doesn't happen. We don't see it. Our sceptical world wants proof and the stories that we tell don't match up to the proof standards that lots of people require. But we have eye-witness testimony of lots of people who were there; they saw the empty tomb. Then there is the testimony of so many people who met the risen Jesus unexpectedly and who believed the evidence of their own eyes. Paul doesn't set out in 1 Corinthians 15 to prove the resurrection; he wants to show Christians how important it is for our faith.

If there is no resurrection, Christian faith falls apart! There's a sweeping statement! That's what Paul says. without resurrection, nothing holds up. In a moment we're going to turn this on its head to celebrate what God has done for us when He raised Jesus, but for a second let's see how Paul puts it. Here is what it means to have no resurrection: Jesus is still dead; preaching is a waste of time; faith collapses; God's reputation is destroyed; the sin-problem remains unsolved because faith hasn't achieved anything; death is the end of everything, and there is no hope; Jesus is a fraudulent "Saviour", not Lord of anything. "If the..." (1 Corinthians 15:16f) This matters to Paul; take away resurrection and everything Christian falls apart; even

the cross is emptied of its power, and becomes the place where Jesus martyred Himself, not the place where He saved us.

Let's turn this on its head and make this a time to celebrate what God has done when He raised Jesus! "*but Christ...*" (1 Corinthians 15:20) Because God raised Jesus, this affects our lives. Our faith in the risen Jesus has an impact on us and here are two ways in which that works.

First of all, "*If Christ...*" (1 Corinthians 15:17) How do we solve the sin-problem? None of us is perfect! We all make mistakes, we get things wrong, we rebel against what seems to be the right way, we even rebel against God. The sin-problem spoils our relationship with God; it puts that relationship out of sorts and part of us knows that we need to sort it for life to be right. But how does that happen? How does the sin-problem become sorted? The Bible tells us that when Jesus died He took on Himself everything in us that stands against God, our faults, our mistakes, our rebellion, and in His death He faced the consequences of all these things in us so that we never have to face these consequences for ourselves; God forgives us and treats us as if we've done nothing wrong. The cross is central to this good news, that we are forgiven people.

That works because of resurrection. When God raised Jesus, He was saying an almighty "Yes" to the cross. When God raised Jesus, He was declaring to the world that what Jesus did on the cross works, and turns His enormous self-sacrifice into gospel, into good news for us; what Jesus did works. Without resurrection, the cross becomes the place where Jesus is martyred, a good man killed by His enemies for something He believed in; that is a very different place to be. Because God raised Jesus, the cross becomes the place of salvation for us, the place where we are reconciled with God, the place where our sin is forgiven. We celebrate resurrection: because God raised Jesus our lives are changed and we are new people; because God raised Jesus we have good news for a world that is still mired in sin and has no other answer to the sin-problem. Because God raised Jesus the sin-problem is solved once for all time.

Secondly, resurrection impacts our lives in the way of hope. "*Those who...*" (1 Corinthians 15:18f) 'Hope' is a brilliant word! How many people in our world are looking for hope? So many! Some look for hope because they want their life to mean something, they want to have some kind of significance for themselves, they want someone to care for them. When God raised Jesus, He brought hope to the world. Hope has two main strands to it: first of all, when God raised Jesus He gave the world the hope that Jesus would be with us always and everywhere. Jesus is with us always and everywhere and is able to help us in all the circumstances of our lives. Life is not something we struggle with alone, but Jesus is with us; we don't always understand that, or recognise Him, but He is with us wherever we go and in all the circumstances of our lives. Not only is He with us but He brings grace and strength to help us navigate our way through life. This is the unseen reality of life and faith, which we see with the eyes of faith. Because God raised Jesus we have the hope that Jesus is with us and that He brings meaning and purpose to our lives. That is something to celebrate.

The second strand of hope is for heaven, for not only this life, but for gift of what Bible so often calls "eternal life". What happens when we die? There are so many questions, but so few answers! But here is one answer, full of hope for us. Paul describes us as "*asleep in Christ*", that when we die we go to be with Christ and we will live forever. The notion of being "*asleep*" means that one day there will be a waking-up and on that day because Christ is raised we too will be raised with Him. That's as far as answers go for now! What happens when we die? Our culture will tell us that our bodies simply decompose and maybe our spirits live on; it is debatable if there is a god, so there is no sense of heaven and eternal life. Paul is clear: because God raised Jesus, we have the hope of heaven, that we will be with Christ and that

one day there will be resurrection and we will live with Him forever. This hope is ours all because God raised Jesus, all because of resurrection.

We could say more, but I'm going to leave the last word to Jeremiah. At the end of the day, the question of resurrection is about who you believe and who you trust. Jeremiah shows us there are two ways: we can either trust "man" or we can trust "God". He shows us the difference. To trust in man is like living in the desert, in the wasteland, where there is nothing, no grace, no hope, nothing for us. By contrast, the one who trusts in the Lord "*will be...*" (*Jeremiah 17:7f*) Here is the person who can cope with things that make him or her afraid; here is person who can cope with worries and anxieties, knowing that the Lord will provide. It is better to trust in the Lord! We are challenged to put our trust in God who has raised Jesus and who has told the world that He has done this. A trustworthy God – do we see that? Can we find it in our hearts to trust God and His word to be true?

We started with a picture that is fake – who can you trust? There are lots of questions about political leadership around for now – who can you trust? Trust is a quality in short supply when people abuse our trust and we are left feeling empty. God is worthy of our trust: His reputation for truth is clear; we can believe the resurrection. This is something God has done; He has raised Jesus from the dead and Jesus is Lord and Jesus lives forever. That truth holds the rest of Christian faith together; it matters that we believe that God raised Jesus. It matters because the heart of our faith is here; it matters because then Jesus solves the sin-problem; it matters because then we have hope to help us when we ask "what happens when we die?" It comes down in the end to "how much do we trust God?" Do we trust God enough to believe resurrection even when we find it hard to understand what happened that Easter Sunday morning? Do we trust God enough to believe that He has forgiven our sins? Do we trust God enough to know that when He says He is with us always and everywhere, we believe Him? Trust is hard in our world, so this is a big challenge, but "*Christ has...*" (*1 Corinthians 15:20*)