

“The Heart of Faith”

February 4, 2007

Pastor Kerry P. Maurer (based in part on a text from Elizabeth Actemeier)

At the center of the Christian faith stands the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We sometimes forget that and think that Easter should be celebrated only once a year.

But actually every Sunday—the first day of each week—celebrates the empty tomb, and apart from Christ risen from the dead there can be no Christian faith.

St. Paul knew that.

In his great chapter on the resurrection of the dead, I Corinthians 15, Paul makes this statement:

"Last of all (Christ) appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles ... But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain."

In essence Paul is saying, If God has not raised his Son, as the New Testament tells us he has, then there is no basis for our Christian faith.

We have not been restored to communion with our God;

The Christian Church is preaching an illusion. And we might as well just give up all of our Christian activity and proclamation and go do something else.

I suppose, in a way, our secular culture acknowledges that, for every year when Easter rolls around in March or in April, the crowds stream into the church doors.

And there are many who have not the foggiest notion why they are there.

But I wonder if it is not some common, deep-seated hunger that drives us all to the church on an Easter—some longing to hear that our final foe, death, has been defeated.

Indeed very often, even though faithful Christians believe in the resurrection, some of them have a rather narrow view of just what it means.

Some of them see it as only a guarantee of their own personal immortality.

And so perhaps for all of us, we need to examine the event more closely.

Let's ask it this way: What would it mean for you and me and for all the world if Jesus Christ were not raised from the dead, if there really were no resurrection with its triumph and empty tomb?

If the resurrection has not taken place, then it is precisely as Paul says it is—all faith is futile.

There is no meaning to our history. There is no guiding hand. There is no loving purpose being accomplished, no divine plan being worked out.

You and I and all folk are just living out our 70 or 80 years, pouring out our work, our care, our love and suffering for a world going nowhere at all, for an evil joke called human life, perpetrated by chance.

Several years ago there was a very popular movie, starring Tom Hanks, entitled *Castaway*.

Hanks played the character of Chuck Noland, a FedEx systems engineer whose personal and professional life are ruled by the clock.

His fast paced career takes him often, at a moment's notice, to far-flung places in the world, and away from the one person he truly loves, his girl-friend, Kelly, played by Helen Hunt.

His world is suddenly shattered when, after a plane crash, he becomes isolated on a remote island, cast away into the most desolate environment imaginable.

Stripped of all the conveniences of modern life, Chuck must learn to meet the basic needs of survival – water, food, and shelter.

The consummate problem solver, Chuck figures out how to sustain himself physically, but then what?

At that moment his true journey begins.

Chuck Noland realizes that his greatest need is companionship ... that a life lived alone is not living.

He remembers all the hurts he caused in his young life ...

And he comes to cherish the one friend he has on the deserted island ... a volleyball that he calls "Wilson."

In one poignant scene in the movie Chuck comes to grips with the sins of his life ... it is the moment when his life begins again:

(Show Chapter 24 of *Castaway*)

After four years on the island, fate gives Chuck a chance to fight his way back to civilization.

Only to find an unexpected emotional challenge greater than all the physical ones.

It is then that Chuck realizes that his ability to persevere and to hope are a product of his life changing experience on the island.

For the Christian that life changing experience is the Resurrection of Christ.

An event that does not promise to make all the bad things go away.

But a life-changing experience that gives us a strength to persevere and to hope beyond life's greatest challenges.

Chuck Noland discovered that the world in which he immersed himself was ultimately meaningless.

Chuck Noland discovered that he had long neglected what was truly important.

Paul realized that the world in which he immersed himself was totally meaningless.

Paul discovered that his life is made new by the grace of Jesus Christ.

What does the Resurrection mean to you?

How has your faith in the Risen Lord changed your life?

I want to share with you one of the final scenes from the movie 'Castaway.' Where Chuck Noland fully embraces life filled with truth, pain and promise.

(Show chapter 30 of "Castaway")