

“Sine Qua Non”

Dear friends, Happy Easter and welcome, once again, to our worship. Not long after his conversion to becoming a Christian, the apostle Paul made an interesting statement about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was talking about whether or not the dead could be raised; whether or not Jesus had actually come back to life. What he said was interesting, not so much because of what he said about Jesus, but because of what he said about us.

Do you know what he said about us? (He said), “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith.” (He said), “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you’re still in your sins.” (He said), “If Jesus is still in the grave, those who’ve died (as believers) are all lost.” And then (he said), “If Easter never happened, if our hope in Jesus is only for this life, then we are of all people, the most to be pitied.”

Why would he say that? Why would he make such an outlandish statement? Why would he put at stake everything Christianity stands for and believes in and base it upon whether or not Jesus came back to life?

He said it and (he did it) because it’s true. He said it and he did it because that’s exactly what we teach and believe. The Christian faith stands or falls upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everything we do (in the Church) is 100% dependent upon whether or not Easter really happened.

If it happened, then it’s possible for you and me to have life, even when we die. If it happened, no matter (who you are) or what you’ve done, it cannot and (will not) stand in the way of your relationship with God. If it happened, then Easter is the best news this world has ever heard, the most important news for you to understand and apply in your life...if it happened.

If it didn’t happen, it doesn’t matter who you are or what you’ve done, what we teach and believe, what we think is going to happen when we die. Because if it didn’t happen, then it didn’t happen; and if it didn’t happen, then we are, (as Paul said) of all people, the most to be pitied.

I don’t want to spend any of our time today with things that don’t matter. It’s Easter Sunday. You’ve given up a good part of your morning to come and hear what this day is all about.

Maybe you’re here as a believer, already connected in your faith. Maybe you’re here as an unbeliever; the only reason you’re here is because (someone else) wants you here. Maybe you’re checking it out. Maybe you’re not sure. Maybe you’re one of those who grew up with it (as a kid), but it never really stuck. Maybe you’re feeling stuck. Maybe you’re doing just fine. I don’t know why you’re here. It doesn’t matter.

What I do know is that while you’re here, I don’t want to waste your time. I don’t want to talk about anything that you could find (or get) anywhere else. If you can get it somewhere else, then you don’t need (what I’m going to share), and you may not even need Jesus. But if you can’t, and that’s the claim Jesus made, what we teach and believe, (there’s no other way) then it’s important that you not only hear what Easter is all about, but also how and why what happened on that first Easter has immediate and eternal implications for your life.

Let’s get into it. The sermon title is not a misprint. It’s in the bulletin. Maybe you saw it. Maybe you’ve heard it. Maybe you read it and wondered, “What that’s all about?” Maybe you already know.

“Sine Qua Non (seen-ay qua non).” That’s the title. Three Latin words meaning “without which not.” Let’s say it together: “Sine Qua Non.” “Sine Qua Non.” (Say it again.) “Sine Qua Non.” Now, let’s say it in English: “Without Which Not.” “Without Which Not.” (Say it again.) “Without Which Not.”

Originally, that phrase was a legal term for “a condition or situation without which a certain outcome could not have happened.” It referred to an action or ingredient that was essential to a given result.

As a result, over time, it was used in medicine in regard to any sign or symptom (or finding) whose absence would very likely mean the absence of the disease being considered. Today, it’s used also in literature, as well as in language for a person’s will.

In the Bible, it’s not a phrase used at all. There is no “sine qua non” found anywhere. It’s Latin. The Bible was in Hebrew and Greek. It’s not there.

What is there, and that’s why we’re talking about it today, is a clear and consistent witness to the things about which the Bible speaks. There are certain claims the Bible makes that become the “sine qua non” of the

Christian faith. Claims that are so essential to what we teach and believe that without which all of Christianity would not be able to stand.

Now, we don't have time to get into all of it here today. There are a number of things we'll leave for another day. I want to zero in on just three; three essential elements to the Christian faith, the "sine qua non," the "without which not", upon which everything we teach and believe either stands or falls.

Let me give them to you up front. #1: The person of Jesus Christ: who he is, who he claimed to be. #2: The work of Jesus Christ: what he did, what he accomplished, and why. #3: The implications for your life and the reason you simply cannot ignore what happened on Easter.

Let's take them one at a time, (start with the first), the person of Jesus Christ. You know, it's interesting, no matter where you go, who you talk to, there's (almost) no one in the world (who's heard about Jesus) who doesn't have an opinion about Jesus. Almost everyone who's heard about Jesus has an opinion.

In fact, if we had the time (here today) we could go around and ask for everyone's opinion. I'd be willing to bet (almost anything) that nearly everyone (here today) has an opinion. Almost no one who's ever heard about Jesus, does not have an opinion about Jesus.

Now, some of the opinions are nothing more than that: they're opinions. They're what people think, what they might even believe. They've heard about him. They've read about him. They've talked with others, formulated an opinion. But there's no factual basis for what they think. It's what they think. It's an opinion.

I have opinions about all kinds of things. (We all do.) I have opinions about technology, but I don't know nearly enough to get hired at Google. I have opinions about health care, but (trust me) you would not want me as your doctor. I have opinions about our government, about foreign policy, about what's happening education, professional sports. I have all kinds of opinions. (Every one of us does.) But just because a person has an opinion doesn't mean that opinion is what's actually true.

I'll tell you what's true. Here's what Jesus claimed for himself. Here's what he said about who he was and what he came into this world to accomplish. He said (in no uncertain terms) that he was God. He said (more than once) that he came into this world for the sole reason of saving it. He said he was born to die. He said that when he died, he'd come back to life. And he said that, (in coming back to life), he'd become the only path to finding life.

Now, you can have an opinion about what he said, whether or not it was true. (We all do.) Everyone does. But you cannot argue with what he said. (That's what he said.) He said he was God. He said he was going to die. And he said that, when he died, three days later he'd come back to life.

Now, either what he said was true or it wasn't. Either who he claimed to be was who he actually was, or it was all a lie. (It can't work both ways.) Either Jesus was God or he wasn't. Either he (came into this world to save it) or he didn't, and he was something else.

I read this past week (not the first time) that (in our culture today), in the past few years, there's been an increasing interest in spirituality and an increasing dis-interest in the claims of the Christian faith. More people are asking the big questions of life, ("Where we came from? Why are we here? What happens when we die?"), but not so sure about where to find the big answers to life.

Do you want to know the prevailing thought? (I'll tell you what it is.) All paths lead to the same place. (That's the prevailing thought.) Every religion gets you to the same destination. That's what many people think. But is it true? Is it actually the case? Are all religions going after the same thing? Or is there a difference? Is there a fundamental and distinguishing factor that can help sort it out?

The answer is there is. The answer is they're not the same. There is a difference. The difference is Jesus. The difference is his claim to be God. No other religion makes that claim. No other religious leader comes even close. The closest they come is to say their leader was sent from God. A prophet, a spokesman, a person that was holy.

That's not what Jesus said. He said he was God. (You can't argue with that.) He said, "I and the Father are one." And he said, "If you want to get to the Father, (make it into the kingdom), then you need to go through me."

Now, you can have an opinion about what he said. You can believe what you want about whether or not it's true. But there's no question he said it. There's no debate about the claims he made. He made them. He said he was God, he said he was going to die, and when he died, he'd come back to life.

If it didn't happen, then it didn't happen. If it didn't happen, then all of this is worth nothing. But if it did, and he really was, and he died and actually came back...? If it's really true...?

It's the "sine qua non" of the Christian faith. It's the "without which not" all of this either stands or falls. It doesn't matter what people think. Almost everyone has an opinion. Find out what's true. Listen to what Jesus said. Look at the facts and then figure it out for yourself.

The person of Jesus Christ (that's the first): who he is, who he claimed to be. The work of Jesus Christ (that's the second): what he did, what he accomplished, and why.

And so, what are the facts? What actually happened on that first Easter? Now, again, we don't have time to go through the whole story. I'll give you some homework. Go home and read the story. Find out what happened. Read through the gospels.

There are four gospels. Pick one of them; four different accounts of Jesus' life. Mark has one. Matthew has another. Luke and John, same thing. Did you know, in those four accounts, there's a total of 89 chapters? Did you know that of those 89 chapters, 29 are dedicated to the final week of Jesus' life? How come?

Four gospels, four stories of Jesus' life, one out of three chapters to that final week? What's going on? (I'll tell you what's going on.) That's when it happened. That's when Jesus proved to the world that what he said about himself was true.

Do you know what happens when a person is crucified? That's what happened to Jesus. He was crucified, nailed to a cross. Do you know what happens when a person's crucified? Do you know what happened to Jesus before he died?

Go through the accounts. In all four accounts, it says the same thing. Jesus was arrested and charged; six different trials, from Thursday night until Friday morning.

Do you know what they found in those trials? They found nothing. There was nothing Jesus had done wrong. They had no crime against him, no accusation that would stick. Pilate was ready to let him go. So was Caiaphas. So was Annas. It didn't happen. How come?

Do you know what Jesus said, before those trials even started? He said, "No one takes my life from me. I lay it down of my own will." Why did he do it? Why didn't he call it off?

Matthew tells us the soldiers put a scarlet robe on him, twisted a crown of thorns and forced it into his skull. They put a staff in his hand, knelt in front of him and said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (It says) they took the staff and (struck him in the head) again and again. Why did Jesus allow it? Why did he keep silent? The only innocent man who has ever lived; how come?

Mark tells us that Jesus was flogged; 39 times. 40 would kill a man. Jesus received 39. It almost killed him, but not yet. (Why did it happen?) "He saved others," they shouted, "but he can't save himself."

Do you want to know the truth? Most people don't want to know the truth. Do you want to know the truth? Jesus could have saved himself, but then he couldn't have saved you. That's the truth. Jesus died so that you don't have to die. Jesus took the punishment (that belonged to us) so we don't have to.

John says Jesus went out "carrying his own cross." Before being nailed to it, he had to carry it. Before hanging from it until he died, he had to carry up the hill. (He knew it was coming.) Read the story. Many times he had predicted it. Why did he do it? Why did Jesus choose to die?

Luke says it was "the place called the Skull" where Jesus was crucified; between two criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. Do you know what's ironic about that scene? Do you know what Jesus said from the cross? He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing."

Let me ask you a question. "Do you know what you're doing in life? Do you know the reason God has given you life?" (It's an important question.) Most people never figure it out. They go all the way (to the end) and they never know why they're here. Do you know why you're here? It's not an accident.

You're not here for you. You've been placed in this world for him. You're not here because you've chosen to be here. You're here because God has chosen you (in Jesus) to be his child.

That's what the work of Jesus was all about. Jesus didn't come into this world to condemn it. He came to save it. Jesus didn't hang on the cross and give up his life for no reason. He hung on the cross and gave up his life so you and I could have ours.

It's the "sine qua non" of the Christian faith. It's the "without which not" all of this either stands or falls. If Jesus was not the Son of God, then your opinion is as good as mine. If Jesus had not suffered and died as he

did, and on the third day come back to life, then everything we're doing is for naught. The good news is that it's not for naught. The better news is that it all happened for you.

Again, read through the stories. We're not getting into all of it here this morning. But starting next week and in the weeks that follow, we'll be reading the stories of what happened.

Do you know what happens when a person is crucified? (It's a torturous death.) Do you know what else happens? The disciples were scared to death when Jesus died. (That's what happens.) Every one of them (except for John) was nowhere to be found. Judas betrayed him. Peter denied him. The others ran off and hid.

What happened to make it change? What took place that all of a sudden made the difference? What happened was Easter. What happened was that Jesus came back to life.

That brings us to the final "sine qua non" of the Christian faith, the final (and ultimate) "without which not" all of this either stands or falls. Is Jesus still alive? (That's the question.) Are lives still being transformed? (That's the ultimate test.)

I'm not going to ask (again) what happens if it didn't happen? We already said. (It's all a joke.) We are, of all people, most to be pitied, if it didn't happen. I'm not going to ask, "What happens if it didn't?" I am going to ask, "What happens if it did?" What if Jesus is actually alive?

Did you know there's more proof of the resurrection of Jesus Christ than there is of the life of Julius Caesar? Did you know there are more accounts of what happened when Jesus was raised than there are of when Columbus discovered the Americas?

Why is it so easy (for so many) to accept the one, and so hard to believe the other? Why do we take (so readily) almost at face value, the truth of almost any other historically recorded event, but have such a hard time with one that's been so historically recorded?

Last September, our world lost one of its highly respected theologians and authors, a man named Wolfhart Pannenberg. Not long before he died, he made this statement. He said, "The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: One, it is a very unusual event; very unusual. And two, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live."

Do you know what those disciples did after Easter? Do you know the kind of change that took place, once they realized the story was true? Their fear turned to faith. Their denials turned to devotion. Every one of those disciples was willing to sacrifice their life.

Go down the list. (Do you know what happened?) Philip was scourged and then crucified. Matthew was nailed to the ground before they cut off his head. Jude was beaten to death. Simon was tortured and nailed to a tree. John was whipped and then exiled. James was beheaded. The other James was pushed to his death from the top of a building. Andrew hung on a cross for three days before he died. Bartholomew was skinned alive. Thomas was speared with a javelin. Peter was crucified upside down.

Now, why do I tell you this? Not a very encouraging way to get people to sign up. I tell you because if the resurrection never happened, none of what I just told you would have ever happened. No one in their right mind would die for a lie. No one in this world would give up their life for something that wasn't true.

The truth is it was true, and it is true, and there's nothing more important in this life for you to know. Jesus died on the cross to become your Savior. He rose from the dead to become your Lord. But you'll never know what it means to live, until you learn what it means to trust.

In football they call them the chain gang. Whenever it's close to being a first down out comes the chain gang to measure. Do you know the difference between knowing the story of Easter and living the life Jesus offers? It's a matter of inches: eighteen inches between having Jesus in your head, and allowing Jesus into your heart.

I don't know what brought you here today. We're all here for different reasons. (It doesn't matter.) What matters is what happens when we leave.

People say, "God is my copilot!" I'll tell you something. If God is your copilot, it's time to trade seats! Jesus didn't die to take a supporting role. He died to become your Lord. He came back to life to take control. And he'll give you a better life, a more meaningful life, a life that can set you free, never end, even when you die. But it has to move from your head to your heart and, from there, into your life.

My friends, I can't convince you to believe in the resurrection. All I can do is to tell you what happened and why we teach and believe what we do. If it didn't happen, then it didn't happen, and all of this is a joke, our preaching, our teaching, everything we're about. None of it matters, if it didn't happen.

But if it did (and it did), there's nothing more important for you to know and to believe and to trust.

It's the "sine qua non" of the Christian faith. It's the "without which not" upon which it all depends. The person of Jesus; who he was and who he is. The work of Jesus; what he did and what he accomplished, and why. The implications for your life; why none of us here today can ignore what happened on that first Easter.

Don't walk away this morning with the story only in your head. Open your heart. Learn what it means to trust. Come back next week. (Don't stop.) Keep coming. Jesus died to become your Savior. He's now calling you to trust him as Lord.

Let's pray. Gracious God, We thank you for all that you've done for us in Jesus. For his life, his death, his resurrection from the dead, and for all that it means for us. We thank you that there's more to life than what this world has to offer, that we can find meaning and hope and a reason to live in the work you've accomplished for us in your Son. We thank you that we now have a life that goes beyond this life and that continues on forever with you.

Help us to trust in what you have done. Help us to believe in who you are and what you have accomplished. Help us to know, even in our doubts, that what was done and accomplished (by you) was for us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.