

READ THE TEXT

Have you ever wondered what the world would be like
if certain events had happened differently?

For example,
what if the fateful bullets fired by Lee Harvey Oswald had missed President
Kennedy back in 1963?

What if Kennedy had finished his first term...and possibly been re-elected in 1964?

What would have happened in Viet Nam?
What would have become of the arms race?

Surely history would have been different in many ways!

And what if the Titanic hadn't hit that iceberg?
Or what if the terrorists had been foiled on September 11?
What if Adolph Hitler had died of a childhood disease?

Let's come closer to home...

Have you ever asked yourself: “What if I had never met or married my spouse?
What if it had been someone else?”

I wouldn't have these children...
I'd have others...or maybe none at all!
And what a vastly different life I'd be leading!

But this is all nonsense, someone will complain.

Those bullets did find their target in 1963.
And my spouse and I did meet, and marry...and my life has gone this way.
What's the good of asking “WHAT IF?”

Just this.

Sometimes we take for granted the good things we have.

Sometimes we don't appreciate what we have until we are in danger of losing it...
good health
a faithful mate
steady work.

Today is Easter Sunday.

We are sitting here in church doing what we do each year...
singing the same songs, hearing the same story...

Perhaps taking it all for granted. Waiting for tomorrow's routine to resume.

Stop a moment.

WHAT IF THERE WERE NO EASTER?

What if Jesus hadn't risen to life on that chilly April morning 2000 years ago?

What would the world be like?

No Easter parades... No Easter baskets... No Easter Bunny stories...
No Easter lilies... No Easter egg hunts...

True enough. But those are superficial things. Think more soberly...

What would your life be like?

What would be your HOPE? Your reason to live?

This is no child's game of "let's pretend."

And I am not the first to ask this question.

St. Paul raised it in the section I read a moment ago.

For his world scoffed at the idea of the dead coming to life.

Even in the church at Corinth, so we gather, were some folks who had trouble
with this part of the Christian message.

To them and to us, Paul poses his startling "WHAT IF?"

If Christ be not raised.... then WHAT?

One after another, Paul draws out
a string of sobering conclusions.

IF CHRIST BE NOT RAISED

Then, first of all, OUR PREACHING IS IN VAIN!

The Greek word literally means “empty.”

If Jesus has not been raised, then all the sermons being delivered by preachers today (including this one!) are just EMPTY WORDS.

Like someone handing a squirrel a nutshell with no nut inside...poor squirrel!

Or your boss handing you a pay envelope full of Monopoly money...poor YOU!

Indeed he writes in verse 15, **we are found to be misrepresenting God.**

To put it another way:

If Jesus has not been raised, then not only are the preachers LIARS
but the entire church is one GIGANTIC FRAUD –
a cathedral built on a foundation of whipped cream

for this message of a crucified Savior who has come back alive
is the heart of all we preach and teach.

A fraudulent church and empty preaching would be bad enough, but there's something even WORSE, says Paul:

IF CHRIST BE NOT RAISED...

Then, secondly, YOUR FAITH IS ALSO IN VAIN.

For faith rests on what is preached.

Imagine an investor who, in good faith, has put all his savings into the hedge funds managed by Bernard Madoff.

That investor's “good faith” is worthless, because it was built on a \$65 billion Ponzi Scheme. He has lost his money.

If Christ has not been raised, says Paul,

then (in the same way) **YOUR FAITH is futile, and you are still in your sins.**

Your peace of mind? An illusion!

Like the prisoner who awakens from a beautiful dream of freedom
only to find that he is still in chains!

If Christ has not been raised, then all the things your faith led you to do –

resisting temptations
giving money to worthy causes
worshipping and praying
patiently bearing a cross of suffering
and witnessing to others about what you believe –

has been a gigantic WASTE OF ENERGY.

If there really were NO EASTER, then not only is
my PREACHING empty, and your FAITH in vain,
but, worst of all, says Paul in verse 18,

THOSE WHO HAVE DIED IN CHRIST HAVE UTTERLY PERISHED!

Maybe just now you are remembering someone you have lost in death ...
a dear spouse,
your parents or grandparents,
or someone else you cared deeply about.

I am remembering today a man named Ken Thompson.

Ken was an elder at my first congregation in Vancouver. A plump, friendly man
in his 50s

When our family arrived there, Ken and his wife Elizabeth “adopted” us as if we
were their own family.

Every birthday was remembered...every anniversary too.

On Easter Sunday, there were always baskets of goodies for the children
on our back porch.

No name was attached, but we knew who had brought them.

Ken was a shy man, and his prayers awkward.

But I remember how, after the meetings were over, he would come up to me
and ask, “Tell me, pastor, how are you?”

Then came the news that Ken was ill. It was Hodgkins Disease – a form of
cancer that affected the lymph system. His condition worsened quickly.

One day near the end, I visited Ken in the hospital.

His neck was swollen grotesquely and his skin jaundiced dark yellow.

Even then, I remember, Ken looked up at me and in a hoarse whisper, he asked,
“How are YOU, Pastor?” A man of deep love. Deep faith.

But...if Christ is not raised,
then Ken – despite all that love and faith – has perished utterly,
and the passing years will erase all his work, and even his memory.

St. Paul has taken us all the way to the frightful end of ‘WHAT IF?’

If Christ is not raised, then the dead have perished, our faith is futile,
and our preaching is empty words.

If Christ is not raised,
then this Easter celebration is a pathetic shell game, and we are
of all men most to be pitied

BUT NOW!!!

Those words ring out like a gunshot in a quiet forest...

BUT NOW...

Like a trumpet reveille that awakens soldiers sleeping in their tents...

BUT NOW IS CHRIST RISEN FROM THE DEAD!

Against all our fears and doubts.
Against all our dullness and apathy
Against all despair and every broken heart,

Paul hurls the GREAT FACT, that SOLID, JOYFUL TRUTH of Easter...

CHRIST IS RISEN!

And there it stands – the Rock of Gibraltar of the Christian faith.

It was no weak wish fulfillment
that propelled those timid disciples across oceans.

It was no illusion, no fantasy
that emboldened the martyrs to step into the arena
or go to the cross as their Lord had done.

CHRIST IS RISEN! (He is risen indeed)

We can be sure of it!
For they saw him, ate with him. They touched his pierced side.
Their testimony is true.

And because it is true,
my preaching is NOT empty, but full of POWER and AUTHORITY.
HIS power. HIS authority!!

He is ALIVE, and **I am not ashamed of the Gospel, it is the power of God
that saves all who believe it.**

He is ALIVE,
and because of it, your faith can be SURE.
Your sins are FORGIVEN. Your heart at PEACE!

Best of all, those who have died in Christ have NOT perished utterly...

Not dead, but sleeping is what Jesus said of Jairus's daughter,
as He took her by the hand to lift her up and back into life.

Not dead, but sleeping. So he says of my brother Ken Thompson,
and of Chelsea Hicks, and Joe and Arlene Donovan,
and Pastor Messerli and Art and Mary Kasting,
and all the saints who from their labors rest!

The Greek word for SLEEPING is koimasthai, the root of the English word cemetery
It was the early Christians who adopted the practice of
naming their burial places "cemeteries" –
a hope-filled name for a place most people dread – a name full of Easter Hope.

Not dead, but sleeping!
So we too may say, for NOW IS CHRIST RISEN.

What a joyful sound! What a glorious truth on which to build one's life!

Sing it, choir! Sing for all you're worth!

Rejoice, people! Appreciate what you have from God.
Know that He will keep His promise. "Because I live, you will live also!"

CHRIST IS RISEN! (He is risen indeed, Alleluia).

Amen.