

**Where do you put your hope?
In the resurrection of the dead!**

¹⁰ When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: “I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense. ¹¹ You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. ¹² My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. ¹³ And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. ¹⁴ However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, ¹⁵ and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. ¹⁶ So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man. ¹⁷ “After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. ¹⁸ I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. ¹⁹ But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. ²⁰ Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin— ²¹ unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: ‘It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.’”

When you step into a voting booth you hope that the legislators you supported will create a budget for the commonwealth that will benefit its citizens and not their own agendas. If you are a registered democrat you hope that sometime soon there will be a clear nominee for your party. If you are a republican you hope this battle between the two democratic candidates continues. It's better for your party's nominee. And if you are an independent, it's a hopeless situation.

The Apostle Paul was familiar with politicians. On his many travels he had been arrested and dragged into court numerous times. From the courts of his own countrymen to the Roman judicial system he found some rulers to be unreliable crooks and others to be honest and just. But he didn't put his hope in any of them to do the right thing. This morning in our lesson, the apostle Paul is once again in court. He stands in the palace of Felix, the Roman governor of Judea, which was in Caesarea; a port city located about 60 miles northwest of Jerusalem. Opposing him were the Jewish ruling council, called the Sanhedrin, along with the chief priest himself, Ananias, and their lawyer, Tertullus. Paul was accused of rioting among the Jews all over the world, being a ringleader of a new religious sect, being a troublemaker and desecrating the temple. We need to rewind about two weeks to understand how Paul ended up in court.

The apostle had just returned from his third missionary journey. He had traveled all over Asia Minor and Greece, collecting money from the Christian congregations to present an offering to the congregation in Jerusalem. They were struggling financially because of persecution there. While he was in Jerusalem, there happened to be some Jews from Asia Minor also there. While Paul had been in Asia Minor, these Jews had opposed him and tried to kill him. So now, while they were in town celebrating the Feast of the Harvest (Pentecost), and saw Paul, they wanted to kill him. They shouted to the mass of worshipers in the temple area that this man tried to bring a Gentile into the Jewish court. As we learned last week, that was a big no-no. This, of course, ignited a huge riot and Paul was almost torn to pieces. The Roman garrison commander had to step in with his troops to save Paul. But he was arrested and taken into custody. He was brought to before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, and Paul was again almost torn to pieces by the Pharisees and Sadducees while they fought over something Paul had said. Again the commander had to step in and save Paul. Then, some Jews plotted to assassinate Paul when the Roman soldiers brought Paul to the Sanhedrin the next day. The commander heard about their scheme and called 470 armed soldiers to escort Paul under the cover of darkness to Caesarea, to stand trial before Felix, which is where we find Paul in our lesson. Paul had a rough two weeks.

The next few weeks, months or even years could be rough for you. Experts say that America is now in a recession. A recession occurs when the number of goods and services consumers purchase decreases over two consecutive quarters. The value of your home also drops. The return on long-term investments is not aggressive. Businesses do not expand as widely and therefore jobs are not secure. For you, a recession can mean rough times if you're trying to sell a home, or you own a business, or if you have investments, or have a job. You could lose one or more of those things and you just hope you will get yourself through it. Students, you are nearing the end of your semester. Your parents are hoping that you will end the year with better grades and so you apply yourself and study hard and you hope you will get yourself good marks on that report card. Pastors hope for strong leaders in their church, for outreach minded members and generous givers to support the ministry. Members hope for a pastor who is faithful with his studies, who preaches sermons that are relevant and most importantly, true to the Word, who trains and equips his members for service, who will be there for them.

Here's the problem: too often we put too much of our hope in an individual, in material things and even in ourselves. Our worldly goods and possessions can come and go in the blink of an eye. People are sinful and as a result they can be unfaithful and they break promises. If we put our hope in ourselves and our abilities and "inner strength" we will be sorely disappointed in life. When material goods fail us, when other people fail us and when we fail ourselves we can be lead to deep despair, which is really nothing more than unbelief, not putting our trust in God to provide for us. And when we do despair and lose hope because of the circumstances in our lives, what we really need to be concerned about are our sins. Why do we put our hope in these uncertainties?

Let's go back to the apostle Paul. Here was a guy who had almost been beaten to death by two different mobs. He had a contract out on his life. He stood before a Roman judge who could very well give him an unfair trial, have him tortured, put back in prison or even killed. Here's the kicker... before Paul even arrived in Jerusalem two weeks prior, he knew that these things could happen to him. When Paul first arrived in Palestine, he landed in Caesarea before he traveled to Jerusalem. While in the company of apostles there, a prophet named Agabus traveled up from Judea. He walked up to Paul, untied the belt around Paul's waist, tied Paul's hands and feet with his own belt and prophesied that in this way Paul too would be tied up in Jerusalem. The apostles begged him not to go. But Paul said, **"I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."** Why would he say that? Paul knew that he might die. Yet, he had hope. This hope that Paul expressed was not some pious wish like, "I hope it doesn't rain again today." The word he uses for hope in the Greek is that which looks forward with confidence and has a confident expectation. Paul put his confidence in the one sure and certain event that will take place: that my body will be raised on the Last Day and I will live with my Savior forever, because Jesus raised his body from the grave.

It seemed that everything else in Paul's life was uncertain. He had every reason to despair. But he did not. And neither do you. Stop placing so much of your hope in the economy, in the stock market, in other people or even yourself. Instead, put your hope in a sure and certain thing.

People always like to say, "Two things in life are certain: death and taxes." While that may be true, two things are certain for you because you are a Christian: Christ's death is yours and Christ's resurrection is yours. Through the washing with water and the Word the Holy Spirit created faith in your heart. Faith receives Christ's death as if it were yours. That means your sins died with Christ on the cross. You died and were buried with Christ through baptism. That means that all of your sins of putting your hope in other people or in yourself, those sins have been washed away. Through faith you also receive the gift of Christ's resurrection. You were baptized into his resurrection from the dead, which means you too will rise from the dead.

Secondly, the gift of faith you received at baptism puts your hope in Jesus' promises, which are a sure and certain thing. When you confess your sins at the beginning of the service or when you admit your guilt before you lay your head on your pillow, through faith you believe Jesus' promise that those who in true repentance

come to him for forgiveness are indeed 100% forgiven. In repentance you approach the altar and through faith believe the Lord's promise that his body and blood are truly present with the bread and wine. You put your hope in his promise that this heavenly meal grants you the forgiveness of your sins and again, gives you the gift of eternal life in heaven.

Through the Word and Sacraments, Jesus strengthens your hope in his resurrection which is your resurrection. So when you despair because of a recession, when legislators do not keep promises, when relationships go sour, when a congregation struggles, set those hopeless thoughts aside, turn to Christ, and say, "**My hope is in the resurrection of the dead.**" If you believe Christ's promise that he will raise your dead corpse from the ground and create it new and sinless and reunite that body with your soul, which is no small feat, then believe him when he tells you, "**Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink or about your body, what you will wear. Look at the birds of the air. Your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?**" (Matthew 6:25ff) Put your hope in your Risen Savior, in his resurrection which is your resurrection from the dead.

This past week I had the opportunity to stand in a hospital room with a dead man, surrounded by his family. Some were crying because of grief, a natural reaction for humans to have at the loss of life. But what a wonderful testimony of the hope they all had, knowing that this Christian man was with his Savior at that very moment as smiles spread on their faces as they listened to Christ's promise of resurrection read from the Scriptures. So also, you, when a Christian loved one dies, you will put your hope in the resurrection of the dead. When you finally face death you will have the confidence of the Apostle Paul. You will put your hope in your Risen Lord Jesus. This is why we celebrate Easter for six weeks. This is why you will be faithful in Bible study. This is why you will be faithful in church attendance. This is why you will come to the altar this morning and leave rejoicing. Because the Lord strengthens your hope in Christ's resurrection through his Word and Sacraments. And for that we praise him and proclaim, "He is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen!"