

**1 Corinthians 15:19-27a + Peace for the Broken<sup>1</sup>**  
**Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + Easter Day + 1 April 2018**

**CIR HIRI!<sup>2</sup>**

Will your children's lives be better than yours? Do you think the world they will inherit from us will be more prosperous, more peaceful? Your answer depends on your present situation. Are you in a place of peace today? Or are you in a place of brokenness? Do you yearn for something better?

In 1516, an English churchman named Sir Thomas More published a book called *Utopia*. *Utopia* was a fictional work describing a perfect society: low crime, common goods, minimal work, maximum happiness. It suggested that if society could just get the right plans in place, life in the present would be good, but the future would be better.

At the dawn of the 20th century, many thought the world was well on its way to Utopia. The era brimmed with optimism and hope. People lived in booming industrial cities. Mass travel and mass communication kept making the world smaller. Advances in technology were solving the problems of labor and loss. Medical advances promised greatly improved health. There hadn't been a major war in Europe for almost a century. One historian, who experienced those years, described that age of hope, "***[We had expected] that life throughout the world would become more rational, more humane, and more democratic. We expected that the progress of science and technology would make mankind richer. We had expected that this would all happen peacefully. In fact, we thought that mankind's course was set for an earthly paradise.***"<sup>3</sup>

Yet it only took fourteen years into that new century for those utopian hopes to shatter. By the time World War I was over in 1918, 10,000,000 soldiers were dead, 21,000,000 wounded. The bright hopes for Utopia died in the dark trenches of Europe. Instead of peace and progress, science and technology progressed to the point of breaking the world into a billion jagged pieces.

Sir Thomas More was right. He named his fictional perfect society, Utopia, a word that means "No Place." His point was this. If you want a perfect life, you won't find it in this world. The 20th century has provided graphic proof of that. So what should we expect in the 21st?

What kind of world will our kids inherit? A study recently came out about Generation Z, that is, the kids born between 1999 and 2018. Their view of the world is quite different. "***Thought they are a generation who grew up with designated safe spaces and trigger free zones...[they think] that real safety is myth.***"<sup>4</sup> Gen Z has never known a world where America was not at war, where the threat level was not orange, where the notion of bulletproof backpacks was not unthinkable. Should it be any surprise that a dominant theme in Gen Z literature and entertainment is dystopian future? Dystopia means "Bad Place." Think Hunger Games. Think Ready Player One. Think Blade Runner or Mad Max or Divergent or most video games kids play. What future will Gen Z inherit? They seem to think they know.

Whether we're talking about a generation or your life in general, the future can seem bleak when all you see are the broken pieces: broken health, broken trust, broken dreams. Does that mean you can't find peace and hope? St. Paul addressed that question in his letter to the Corinthian Christians. He told them that if this life is all we've got, then we should be pitied, but...

***"But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."*** Are you feeling broken with no peace or no hope? Look to Jesus who lives! The resurrection of Jesus is God's solution to the brokenness of our world. The resurrection of Jesus is the proof that God will heal the brokenhearted and make all things new.

For 2,000 years, Easter Sunday has celebrated the day that Jesus rose from the dead. Yet before God's people started celebrating Christ's resurrection on Easter, generations of Old Testament believers celebrated this day as the Festival of Firstfruits. On this day, the Sunday after Passover, Israel celebrated the beginning of the grain

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<sup>1</sup> The thoughts and language of this sermon were received with thanks from Pr. Jonathan Schroeder.

<sup>2</sup> "Christ is risen!" "He is risen indeed!" This is known as the *Paschal Greeting*, one of the oldest and most widespread traditions in the Christian church. Throughout the weeks of the Easter season, whenever the minister says to the people, "Christ is risen!", they respond loudly and boldly, "He is risen indeed!"

<sup>3</sup> Arnold Toynbee, *Essential World History*, 491.

<sup>4</sup> *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs, and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation*. Barna Research 2018, 36.

harvest. Families brought the first sheaf of grain from their fields and offered those “firstfruits” to God. The firstfruits were the guarantee, the proof that the rest of the harvest was ready and waiting and coming soon.

When Jesus rose from the dead on the Festival of the Firstfruits, Jesus became the firstfruits, the guarantee, the proof of what was coming. No matter how broken life might seem, the resurrection of Jesus guarantees that our future is not dystopian. How can that be? Paul writes, **“Since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man.”**

To understand our present, Paul takes us back to the past, back to the beginning of time. To understand our future, Paul takes us ahead to the end of time. If you don’t go back to the beginning, you’ll misunderstand the problem. If you don’t look ahead to the end, you’ll misunderstand the solution.

When Paul says death came through a man, he’s talking about Adam—the first man. God had made Adam holy and perfect. God had commanded Adam to demonstrate his love for the Lord by not eating from a certain tree in the Garden of Eden. Sadly, Adam chose to listen to the devil’s lies. He ate the fruit forbidden to him. When he fell into sin, he took the whole world with him. Holiness and life and peace vanished. Sin and death rushed into the vacuum left behind. Even though God created Adam to live and never die, Adam’s sin ushered in the age of the dying—his own death and the death of us all.

Adam sinned, and we, his children, have kept on sinning. We still listen to the devil’s lies. We still hurt our families. We still fail to keep our promises. We still fall so far short. We are still left broken. Now some have said that churches are full of hypocrites, but really, the church is full of broken people. People like me. People like you. It’s not just our world that’s broken. It’s my heart, my life and yours. The proof is that you and I are dying. Every day that goes by brings us one day closer to the grave. Death came through a man. In Adam, you and I just go on dying as we earn the fair wages of sin.

...But here’s the most astounding thing for broken people like you and me. Are you ready for it? The central truth about Christianity is that God doesn’t love the good. He loves the broken, and he refused to leave us in our brokenness. That love moved him to make a plan! Death had come through a man, so God planned that resurrection from the dead would also come through a man. You see, God planned to save us from our dystopian future, becoming a human being and descending into our brokenness, into our broken lives filled with violence and selfishness and greed and lust.

God planned to fix our brokenness by becoming a human being who would do all things right. Then he would pay the penalty—he would die—for all of us who have done all things wrong. Jesus came into this world to take the place of sinners, to take your place and mine. God sent him to bear our sin in this broken world.

When Jesus was on the cross, he was broken for my sin. He was broken for yours. That’s the central message of Christianity! God loves the broken. That’s amazing enough, but even more astounding is this promise. Your relationship with him does not depend on your obedience or your efforts or your goodness, but only on the suffering, death, and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Those painful memories you carry, that guilt you bear, those regrets you haven’t let go...God takes them off your shoulders and puts them on Jesus. They were buried with Jesus with God’s promise that if Jesus comes out of that grave, your sins never will.

...And on the first Easter Sunday, the world got its answer: **CIR HIRI!** God is alive. Sin is dead. Jesus’ resurrection means that you are “redeemed.” You are set free from sin. You are set free from guilt. God’s Easter promise is that your past no longer dictates your future with God. Your future is in the nail-scarred hands of the One who lives because he loves you!

You and I can’t fix the brokenness of life by trying to hold the broken pieces together. So God sent his Son to pick up your broken pieces and make you whole, forgiven, redeemed. His death made it possible, and his resurrection proves it. **“As in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.”**

Judging from their entertainment, Gen Z seems to think the future will be dystopian. I suppose that could be a fair assessment of what the coming years might look like, but that view of the future doesn’t look far enough ahead.

Look further out and see the truth about your future. St. Paul calls it The End, the time when God will fix all the broken pieces. It’s hard to wait for The End. We want God to make everything better now, to fix everything now, but fear not! God will make everything better. That’s what the resurrection of Jesus guarantees. He’s the firstfruits and we will follow, but each in his own order. First Jesus, then those who belong to him.

On that day when Jesus fixes all the broken pieces, he will complete his victory over death, over that great breaker of lives and dreams. No longer will we live in this age of the dying. All of us will be made alive, and death won't be able to do anything about it, because Jesus will make all things new.

A new age of hope dawned that first Easter morning. Not an age of hope based on how you feel today or how life looks right now, but an age of hope founded on the fact that Jesus rose from the dead to set you free from sin.

Perhaps you look at your life right now and see broken pieces and jagged edges. Perhaps you're tempted to think your future is nothing, but dystopian. Perhaps you feel like your relationship with God and others is fractured. That's why Jesus shows you the scars in his hands and side. He shows you his body broken so you can have the peace of his forgiveness. He shows you his empty tomb so you can have the hope of eternal life.

Jesus, then, lifts your eyes from the shattered pieces of this life, and what do you see? You see the dawn of his new day beginning to brighten the dark skies of this world. He tells you, "There. The Goal...the End...it's coming. I am going to fix it all." The resurrection of Jesus is the solution to our brokenness, the source of our hope, and the certainty of our peace. **CIR HIRI!** Amen.