

**Michael Gehring**  
**“When All Seems Lost”**  
**I Corinthians 15: 1–22**  
**Main Street UMC**  
**November 18, 2018**

A friend and I were having a conversation the other day about the General Conference that is happening in Saint Louis, February 2019. As you can imagine, there are a great deal of conversations going on among the clergy and the laity about this upcoming meeting. I have no crystal ball, and I have no clue how the General Conference will navigate all of this. You remember the 2016 General Conference charged the bishops to help find a way forward and they formed a commission that has proposed three different scenarios for the General Conference to work through. My friend expressed his agony over our dividedness, and I thought how strange that we’re allowing one issue about human behavior to define us.

Today is the last sermon of the Apostles’ Creed series and we’re focusing on the line, “*I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.*” You remember in the very first sermon of this series, I said that the early church needed a teaching device that would enable new believers and long-term believers to remember the essentials of the faith. They needed a teaching tool short enough that the believers, who were largely illiterate, could memorize it so that they could always remember who they are and whose they are.

It is interesting and amazing to consider all the things that are not in the Apostles’ Creed. For example, about four decades ago, I remember that a friend’s father told him that if he ever married a protestant, he would disown him. It is worth reflecting in the wake of the 501 year of Martin Luther posting the 95 theses on the castle church door in Wittenberg that the Apostles’ Creed says nothing about church division. The Apostles’ Creed speaks to the unity of the church.

In my college days, I hung out with a holiness crowd. The older generations wanted to instill in the younger generations that they should avoid drinking, dancing, cussing, and secular rock music. In high school (a Roman Catholic all male boarding school), at the football games, the students of Subiaco Academy, yelled, “*We don’t drink, dance, smoke, or chew, or go with girls that do.*” They all lied and needed to go to confession. They would have gone out with any girl regardless of whether she went through ten cans of Skoal or 5 packages of Redman’s a day.

Interesting though, smoking, drinking, dancing, card playing, or dipping Skoal are also not mentioned in the Apostles’ Creed. It is amazing the number of

things that Christians fight over that the early church did not deem essential for a theoretical and theological understanding of the Christian faith.

John Wesley, though not original to him, taught, *“In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things, charity.”*

When we gather in worship, laying down our personae’s, down our bravado, laying down all those illusions we carry, we realize we’re just sinners in need of a Savior. We’re just broken people in need of healing.

The song came out in 1992 and I remember the first time I heard it the words. They cut me to the quick. And the music video set on I-10 in San Antonio is haunting. The lyrics go

*When the day is long  
And the night, the night is yours alone  
When you’re sure you’ve had enough  
Of this life, well hang on  
Don’t let yourself go  
‘Cause everybody cries  
And everybody hurts sometimes.  
When your day is night alone  
If you feel like letting go  
If you think you’ve had too much  
Of this life, well hang on  
‘Cause everybody hurts  
Take comfort in your friends  
Everybody hurts  
Don’t throw your hand... (R.E.M., Everybody Hurts)*

That very first community of disciples and apostles didn’t have the beautiful buildings we have, nor the power and might that the church in America possesses. All they had was Jesus. On that night unlike any other night in their lives, Jesus spoke to them words of comfort and assurance knowing full-well that the shepherd was about to be struck down. When the sun set that evening of Good Friday, all hope seemed lost for them. Their dreams dashed. They had no clue who Jesus really was.

Jesus’ resurrection broke into time and space initiating a new age. The resurrection of the body is not only something that will happen in the future messianic age but is something that has already happened in the here and now. Jesus said to the thief on the cross, *“Today you will be with me in paradise.”* When the kingdom comes in fullness, we will not be *“spirits in a material world”*, as Sting sang so long ago, but we will have new resurrection bodies.

Another thing I said back toward the beginning of this sermons series is that God likes matter. God invented matter. And Jesus at the Last Supper instructed that one way we remember him is by partaking of matter, by partaking of the bread and the cup.

Tom Long who is a retired professor of preaching and one of the foremost experts in the field of homiletics, went back to the church that he did his Field-Ed in when he was a young seminarian. He was invited back to preach their homecoming service. Sitting at a table after the service, he's talking with a woman who was a teenager when he was there. Tom said, *"I so loved your dad. Tell me news of your dad."*

*"Thank you for asking. We lost him two summers ago. But the most amazing thing happened on the afternoon that he died. My brother, sister, and I were in his hospital room. He had had some small strokes and had lost the ability to speak. You remember how dad loved to talk and you can imagine how frustrating that was for him.*

*All of a sudden, he could think things but couldn't get them out. The afternoon he died, there seemed to be something very urgent he was trying to say to us, but the words wouldn't come. Finally, he motioned to the sink and pointed at his mouth. My brother said, 'he wants a drink of water.' So he went over to the sink and got him a glass of water, but when he put it to my father's lips, my father motioned, 'give it to your sister. Drink. Hand it to your brother. Drink.' Suddenly my sister gasped, 'he's serving us communion.'*

*He had been to the Lord's table hundreds of times, and there in the hospital when everyone was expecting death, he announced, while serving communion, that he room was filled with the life and hope of Christ."*

In the midst of all of the controversies and storms of our world, we anchor ourselves in the hope and the ever-present reality of the Lord of the Resurrection.