

## Therefore

*“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).*

### **Fellow Ministers of Christ:**

I attended Immanuel Lutheran High School, College, and Seminary from 1968 to 1978. Looking back, those were such happy, carefree years. Basketball games. Tour choir. Field Day. The banquet. Louis the Lancer. *Cantate Domino*. Lilacs blooming in Spring. At this school, I made lasting friendships. I received an education second to none. I only wish I had studied harder and had told my teachers “thank you” more often.

On graduation day, 1978, I walked across the stage in the Fieldhouse next door, received a theological diploma, and then walked out through the Fieldhouse doors which are just down the hall—into the bright sunshine, into my life and future, into things I expected and things I did not.

Thirty-nine years later, this campus is still a respite for me, as I’m certain it is for all of you. For the past three days, we’ve enjoyed its beauty and serenity, but more importantly, to paraphrase the words of Acts 2:42, we’ve “devoted ourselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship.”

Now, however, it is almost time to leave, to pack our belongings and learnings and return to our homes, congregations, and ministries. Whether we are pastors-elect or pastors-emeritus, whether entering the ministry or retiring from it, how we pass through these doors today—into the bright sunshine, into our lives and futures, into things we expect and things we do not—will depend on whether we view these doors merely as *exits* or as *therefores*.

*Therefore* is an important word. It is a word of transition, explanation, inference, summary, and conclusion. It often provides the reason and motivation for moving forward by looking back to an accomplished fact, and so defined, there are many great “therefores” in Scripture—each one grounded in divine fact.

*“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. **Therefore** we will not fear” (Psalm 46:1-2).*

*“**Therefore**, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).*

*“**Therefore**, there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).*

*“**Therefore**, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17).*

*“**Therefore**, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess” (Hebrews 4:14).*

There are multitudes of other examples, though surely none are more comforting than the great *therefore* of 1 Corinthians 15:58, especially for ministers of Christ. This *therefore* is also grounded in divine fact—the glorious fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Before writing the word *therefore* in verse 58, Paul wrote the following words in verses 56-57: “*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

On at least three occasions, Jesus forewarned His disciples of His impending suffering and death, and with each warning He gave the certain promise of His resurrection. “*The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life*” (Matthew 17:22-23).

Yet, on the first Easter, the disciples were not anticipating a living Lord but mourning a dead Savior. Women hurried to the tomb wondering who would roll away the stone. Mary Magdalene was so distraught she confused the risen Jesus with the cemetery caretaker. Peter and John equated the empty sepulcher with body theft not bodily resurrection. Thomas insisted on viewing forensic evidence. The two disciples shuffling sadly toward Emmaus lamented, “We thought He was the one.”

But then they all encountered the risen Jesus. The fact of His resurrection changed everything—their lives, their deaths, their ministries—and to such an extent that after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the same disciples who once huddled behind the locked doors of an upper room boldly proclaimed the resurrected Christ in the very city in which He was crucified. “*Therefore,*” said Peter, “*let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ*” (Acts 2:36).

Now, what of us? What of our work as ministers of Christ? I can’t speak for others, but I’ve come to realize that whenever I view “*labor in the Lord*” as futile, unproductive, a losing effort, or, to use Paul’s words, “*in vain,*” whenever I despair at empty pews or small budgets, or presume that I must somehow supplement the power of the gospel with power of my own, then and there I’m acting more as if Jesus Christ were still dead and buried than living and reigning.

But Jesus Christ *is* living and reigning. That is a divine fact. It is the fact of His resurrection that transforms these fieldhouse doors today from mere exits into *therefores*.

Whatever our personal or pastoral challenges, as we adjourn our conference and walk through these doors—into the sunshine, into our lives and futures, into things we expect and things we do not—let us do so in boldness and hope, rejoicing with the apostle Paul and saying: “*Thanks be to God! He give us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

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