

RESURRECTED BODIES

Sermon for the 7th Sunday after the Epiphany 2022

1 Corinthians 15:21-26, 30-42

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Second Reading we just heard read, 1 Corinthians 15:21-26, 30-42: ²¹ **For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a man.** ²² **For, as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.** ²³ **However, each one in his own turn: Christ is the first-fruits. After that, when He comes, those who belong to Christ.** ²⁴ **Then the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom to God, the Father, after He has put an end to all dominion, authority and power.** ²⁵ **For He must reign until God has put all His enemies under His feet.** ²⁶ **The last enemy that will be destroyed is death...** ³⁰ **Why are we also risking danger every hour?** ³¹ **Fellow-Christians, I die every day. It is as sure as the boast that I make about you in Christ Jesus our Lord.** ³² **If, like an ordinary man, I fought wild animals at Ephesus, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink! For tomorrow we die.”** ³³ **Do not let anyone deceive you! “Bad company corrupts good habits.”** ³⁴ **Become sober, as you ought to be, and do not sin any longer! For there are some who are ignorant of God. I say this to your shame.**

³⁵ **However, someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?”** ³⁶ **How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.** ³⁷ **When you sow, you do not sow the body that will be but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or one of the other seeds.** ³⁸ **However, God gives it a body as He has determined and to each of the seeds its own body.** ³⁹ **Not all flesh is the same. Human beings have one kind of flesh, animals have another kind of flesh, birds have another kind of flesh, and fish have still another.** ⁴⁰ **There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; but the splendour of the heavenly bodies is different from that of the earthly bodies.** ⁴¹ **The splendour of the sun is different from the splendour of the moon, and the splendour of the stars is different again. Even one star differs in splendour from another star.** ⁴² **It will be like that with the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in decay: it is raised without decay.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

When the Apostle Paul had preached about Jesus and His bodily resurrection to the people of Athens, some dismissed his message with a sneer. Others, more politely, put an end to Paul’s address by vaguely suggesting, “*We shall listen to you again about this*” (Acts 17:32). Perhaps he could finish some other time.

The truth was that a significant majority mocked Paul for the words he spoke about the resurrection of the dead. They did not persecute him, for they tolerated virtually everyone and everything. Tolerance, however, easily becomes *indifference*. They were indifferent to the eternally important message Paul was trying to share with them. While some did hear the Word of God and became believers, there is no further mention in the New Testament of a congregation of believers in Athens.

The kind of reaction Paul received shouldn’t surprise many of us. Today, there are many just like those people of Athens, who are indifferent at the notion of a resurrection of the body. Perhaps they are not sure what to think, while there are others who sneer, preferring to believe that when a person dies, that is it, he is at peace, never to be seen again. While the memory of that person will live on, his body will return to dust, never to rise again. It’s nothing of great concern, so their attitude continues to be, “**Let us eat and drink! For tomorrow we die.**”

It is not like that for those who do believe in a resurrection of the body. Since Christ has called us by the Gospel¹, we know and believe that when the Scriptures speak of a resurrection, it is a certainty waiting to happen. Paul writes, “**since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a man.** ²² **For, as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.**” Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. Easter is a fact not to be denied. It is a reality on which to rest a sure and certain hope. Christ Himself is “*the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep*” (1 Cor. 15:20). Like the first sheaf of grain that God’s Old Testament people were to offer to the Lord as a thank-offering for the rest of the harvest that was ready to be gathered in, so Christ is the first in the harvest of those who are sleeping in their graves. “*Because I live, you also will live*” (John 14:19) is our Lord’s promise. Paul further strengthens this fact by reminding us that we have also been baptised into Christ’s death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5).

¹ 2 Thessalonians 2:14

Because Adam has died, all mankind must die, believers and unbelievers alike; and because Christ rose from the dead, believers and unbelievers too will rise from the dead. We confess this whenever we speak of “*the resurrection of the body*” in the Apostles’ Creed. As believers in Christ, our glorious hope and comfort is the knowledge that the true, whole man, soul and body, will experience the eternal bliss of heaven; that “*(Christ) will change our humble bodies and make them like His glorified body, because He has the power by which He can make everything subordinate to Himself*” (Philippians 3:21). In the resurrection, Jesus will make believers’ bodies like His own glorified body, while for those who do not believe, their soul and body will be thrown into the fiery furnace, where people will weep and grind their teeth.² There they will have to submit to the Lord’s verdict of condemnation, suffering the torments of hell for all eternity.

Paul had declared to the Corinthian Church the fact of Jesus’ resurrection and the possibility, necessity, and certainty of their own resurrection, but there were still some in Corinth who were not satisfied with his arguments. They could not grasp the mechanics of the resurrection – how a corpse which had been reduced to dust or ashes could be raised to life again. So they were asking, “**How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?**”

To such questions, Paul answered, “**How foolish!**” He realised that such questions were not some innocent request for information. Instead, it stemmed from a deep scepticism that wished to mock the very idea of a resurrection. They wanted to know how a decomposed body could rise again. Paul realised that the one asking such questions was no better than the fool who says in his heart that there is no God.³ Paul was correct in suggesting moments before that “**there are some who are ignorant of God. I say this to your shame.**” Anyhow, he answered, “**What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.**³⁷ **When you sow, you do not sow the body that will be but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or one of the other seeds.**³⁸ **However, God gives it a body as He has determined and to each of the seeds its own body.**”

Everyone who has sown seed should have the answer. A seed that is placed into the ground decays, yet its death results in a new life. It bears no resemblance to the plant that will one day emerge. Despite the continuity between the seed and the plant, they bear such a different shape and form that Paul can say that the seed which is sown is not “**the body that will be.**” What is sown is a “**bare seed**” that will take on an entirely different *form* when God makes it alive and decks it out in all its finery. While there is no change by substitution or replacement of the flesh by some ‘phantom spirit,’ it is the same body. The wheat that rises from the seed may differ in qualities and grow to its flowering maturity, *but it remains the same substance.* The body is perfected, but it remains body. Job exclaimed, “*I myself know that my Redeemer lives and that at the last He will stand on the dust.*²⁶ *After this, my skin will surround this body, and from my flesh I shall see God.*²⁷ *I myself shall see Him for myself. My own eyes will see and not as a stranger*” (Job 19:25-27). Job was certain that in the resurrection of the body on the Last Day, the very skin that clothed him during his mortal life would again cover the flesh that had become subject to decay and corruption. From this very same body, Job knew that he would see God. What God does with a kernel of grain He can and will do with our mortal bodies. He can and will give them a new, glorious existence. Paul simply puts it this way, “**The body is sown in decay: it is raised without decay.**”

In our current form, our bodies are ever-changing, dying a little more each day, and are subject to disease and pain and everything else. However, our bodies will be “**raised without decay**” when Jesus “**hands over the kingdom to God, the Father, after He has put an end to all dominion, authority and power.**” Christ will turn over His kingdom to His heavenly Father on that day. This will come as no surprise to those who know that the Son was sent by His Father to accomplish the salvation of the world and to establish His kingdom, the church. When the last chapter of human history has been written, Christ will offer to His heavenly Father the trophies of His victory and the spoils of His triumph. Every enemy, even that last great enemy, death, will have been overcome and put under His feet. With His mission accomplished, His victory won, the Son will turn over His kingdom to His Father and will reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit eternally, and the process of decay will be gloriously reversed when our bodies are raised from the dead, bodies that are conformed to that of Jesus, whose body never saw decay.⁴

This is the promise that He who has broken open the tomb gives to us. This is the assurance He repeats through His apostles that we shall be like Him.⁵ This is a most precious truth because death remains the shadow that darkens all men’s living. “*If a man dies, will he live again?*” remains the paramount question of life.

Death comes to all, for “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Rom. 3:23). But for each one of us here today, who have been baptised into Christ’s death and resurrection, we need not fear death because it has been robbed of

² Matthew 13:42

³ Psalm 14:1; 53:1

⁴ Acts 2:27, 31; 13:35-37

⁵ Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:2

its hideousness and terrors. Instead, we long for the resurrection and know it to be true because Christ has won the victory over the grave. Paul writes to the Colossian Church, “*For you have died, and your lives have been hidden with Christ in God.*” ⁴ *When Christ, who is your Life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory*” (3:3-4). Our eternal life, which we possess already now through baptism, will be fully experienced in heaven and then further shared with our resurrected, perfect bodies when the Lord comes again. What marvellous joy awaits us all!

So it is that death becomes a blessed incident of life, not an impediment to, not an end, but a forerunner of life, even as the seed in the ground points to the great and beautiful harvest. That is why the Scriptures often speak of death, not as a “burying,” but as a “lying down, a sleeping, or a planting.” That is why we see graves not as dank caves of gloom and fear and ignorance but as corridors to glory. That is why we know that our graves are not the end for us.

Finally, then, we must consider that, though this doctrine of the resurrection of the body brings good tidings, it is this only to the one who believes, whose faith is in the resurrected Christ, the Son of the living God. While all will hear the trumpet of God and rise from their graves to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, not all will enjoy the body of glory. Daniel says, “*Many of those who are asleep in the land of dust will wake up, some to everlasting life and others to shame and everlasting abhorrence*” (Dan. 12:2). And Jesus Himself says, “*He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who does not believe in the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him*” (John 3:36).

May God grant that the words of life find deep root in our hearts so that we are comforted in the knowledge that one day, we shall, both soul and body, be with our Saviour for an eternity. Because He lives, we too shall live. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Lord God, You are gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and full of constant love; You are good to all, and Your kindness is on all You have made. We come before You with confidence, offering our worship and bringing our prayers.

We thank You above all else for the love You have shown us in Christ Jesus, who was put to death for our sins and raised to life that we might be justified before You. We confess our many sins to You, and acknowledge that we have not deserved Your great mercy. But grant us who have confessed our sins joy in this, that You for Christ’s sake, according to Your promise, forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all our wrong-doings.

Forgive us especially our sins of despising and neglecting Your Word; in Your grace do not take it from us. By Your Holy Spirit help us to treasure it, and to use it with sincere and open hearts. Grant that it may take root in us as good seed in good ground, grow up, and bring forth much fruit to the glory of Your name.

Save and defend Your Church from all evil. Bless all preaching and teaching of Your Word of life. Help all Your children to be obedient to Your truth, conscientious in their daily work, patient in sufferings, and upheld by the blessed hope of everlasting life.

We ask Your blessing on the Walther Seminary in the USA. Give to the two students studying there, joy in their work, and guide and bless their teachers. Guard and keep them by Your power from all dangers of body and soul.

We pray for our government. Give us unselfish and trustworthy leaders, and a society that reflects high moral values.

Bless our homes, and make them dwelling-places of Your Spirit, places where Christ is honoured in the teaching and love of parents, and in the obedience of children.

We ask Your mercy on those who are sick; help them to know and rejoice in the grace and healing power of Christ. Comfort the sorrowing; be with the lonely; support the aged and infirm. Give faith in Your power and mercy to any who are struggling with doubt or depression, temptation or trial; teach them to know that the grace of Christ is always sufficient, and remind them that Your power is strongest when they are weak.

Let the word of Christ in all its richness live in our hearts, and help us all to receive the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls. We ask this in the name and for the sake of Jesus our Saviour. Amen.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Genesis 45:3-15

³ Then Joseph told his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?”

However, his brothers could not answer him because they were terrified at his presence. ⁴ Joseph told his brothers, “Please come closer to me!”

Therefore, they went closer. He said: “I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.” ⁵ Now, however, do not be sad or angry with yourselves for selling me here! For it was to save lives that God has sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been a famine in the land, and there are five more years when there will be no ploughing or harvesting. ⁷ God has sent me ahead of

you to preserve for you a remnant on the earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.⁸ So now, it has not been you who have sent me here, but God. He has also made me a father to Pharaoh, master over his entire household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.⁹ Go up to my father quickly and tell him, ‘This is what your son Joseph has said: “God has made me master of all Egypt. Come down to me immediately!”¹⁰ You shall live in the region of Goshen, and you yourself, your children and your grandchildren will be near me with your flocks, your herds and everything else that you have!’¹¹ I shall provide for you there. For there will be five more years of famine. Otherwise you, your family and all who belong to you will lose your property.”¹² Look! Your own eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin can see that it is my mouth that is speaking to you.¹³ Tell my father about all the honour given to me in Egypt and about everything that you have seen and bring my father down here quickly!”

¹⁴ Then he fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck.¹⁵ Joseph kissed all his brothers and wept over them. After that, his brothers talked with him.

1 Corinthians 15:21-26, 30-42

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Luke 6:27-38

²⁷ “However, I tell you who are listening: Love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you!²⁸ Bless those who curse you! Pray for those who mistreat you!²⁹ If someone strikes you on the cheek, offer him the other also! If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic as well!³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you and, if someone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back!³¹ Treat other people the same as you want them to treat you!³² If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.³³ For, if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same.³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you expect to get it back, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners to get equal payment back.³⁵ Rather, love your enemies! Do good and lend, without expecting to get anything back! Then your reward will be great, and you will be the children of the Most High, because He is kind to ungrateful and wicked people.³⁶ Be merciful, as your Father also is merciful!³⁷ “Stop judging, and you will certainly not be judged. Stop condemning, and you will certainly not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be for-given.

³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you. People will put a good measure, pressed together, shaken down and running over, into your lap. For the measure with which you measure others will be used for you in return.”