

1 Corinthians 15:21-26, 30-42
"The Resurrection Body"
Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany (C)

February 20, 2022
First Ev. Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

Last week, we heard of the "Resurrection Connection" as the Apostle Paul connected the dots between Christ's bodily resurrection and ours. The issue at hand was that many in Corinth could not fathom the idea of a bodily resurrection.

Instead of holding onto faith, many of the Corinthians were holding on to logic and reason. And since they did not see people being bodily resurrected from the dead in their daily life, many thought the resurrection was bunk.

God certainly gives us logic and reason, but since the fall of Adam, our logic and reason is often flawed, due to sin. So, when we attempt to follow our logic and reason, we are to always remember to test it using God's Word as He reveals to us in Scripture. Remember, God is God and we are not, so when we end up trusting our logic and reason over God's Word, we are then putting ourselves in the place of God. We are making ourselves gods.

So, as we heard last week, Paul, through the Holy Spirit, wrote of the eternal benefits of Christ rising from the dead, saying: ***"For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished"*** (1 Corinthians 15:16-18).

So, without Christ's bodily resurrection, the Christian faith is pointless. We are dead in our sins. But since Christ has been raised, the Christian faith is sure and certain. Since, Christ is risen, we shall also rise!

Now that Paul has encouraged the Corinthian church and us of the benefits of Christ's resurrection, the next question is what does our bodily resurrection look like? Today on this Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany, Paul gives us the most complete commentary on the Christian's resurrection body.

[The Final Enemy: Death]

Louis XV, the king of France (1710-1774), ordered that no one should speak about death in his presence. He tried to avoid any visible sign or symbol or place that would remind him of the mortal nature of life in this world. Yet, just like us, the king could never escape this last great enemy anymore than a cat can escape its enemy by concealing its body, but leaving its tail exposed.

The reality of death is difficult to deny or ignore. God does not deny death, conceal it, or sugarcoat it like we tend to do today. We all die because we are sinners. Every human body will undergo decay in the grave. But the good news is that the sting of death – *its curse and punishment* – has been removed through Jesus Christ. ***“For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead”*** (1 Corinthians 15:21).

Since Christ has been raised from the dead, He has defeated the power of sin, death, and hell. Death has lost its sting! The grave for the Christian becomes the gate to heaven.

So, just as Adam’s sin and death affected not only himself but all of humanity, so the Corinthians needed to appreciate that Christ’s resurrection was not only for His own benefit; through Jesus the resurrection from the dead had become the destiny for all believers. For just as Adam was the head of the old humanity, so that his fall left a legacy of sin and death to all, so Christ stands as the head of the new humanity to be made alive in Him.

It is only through Holy Baptism that we belong to Christ. Through baptism, God gives us faith, so we can receive the gift of resurrection to eternal life. But first things first. The end is not yet, so our loved ones must rest in the grave for a time. But everything will happen in its proper order. Christ’s resurrection is the great first step, the firstfruits hold the promise of everything else. Then His resurrection leaven – *all the faithful in Christ* – will be raised when He descends from heaven ***“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the sound of the last trumpet”*** as He descends through the clouds on that Last Day. (1 Corinthians 15:52)

At no point here does Paul refer to the fate of unbelievers. Paul’s concern here is to bring comfort and hope to the believers. So, at the appointed time, Christ will usher in the consummation of the age through His reign in putting all His enemies under His feet, including the final enemy: death. (1 Corinthians 15:24-26)

The fact that death is our enemy has immense significance at Christian funerals. Sometimes at funerals, one may hear comments like: “*Don’t be sad, we should rejoice. This is a victory celebration!*” Now, there is a sense that this is true, but death – the last enemy and the sign of sin’s universal dominion over fallen humanity, will not be swallowed up until the Last Day (1 Corinthians 15:54), so Christians are free to grieve the death of their loved ones. But Christians ought not to mourn at funerals as those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Christians certainly mourn, but our mourning is mixed with hope. Our tears are mixed with faith. Our sadness is mixed with joy.

Christ’s bodily resurrection proves that God the Father has subjected all things, even death, to Him.

[How are the Dead Raised?]

From here, Paul asks in effect, “*What’s the point? If the dead are not raised, what good does it to me to live in daily fear of my life*” (1 Corinthians 15:30-32). It would make much more sense to get the most out of this life, so “***Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die***” (1 Corinthians 15:32; Isaiah 22:13). So, if Christ has not been bodily raised from the dead, let us die “***without hope and without God in the world***” (Ephesians 2:12).

The world we live in is without hope and without God. Without God, nothing matters. It is a world of nihilism. It is a world of chaos. It is a world of no objective truth. Right is wrong. Wrong is right. Up is down. Down is up. Men are women. Women are men. This is the world we find ourselves in today. It is a world without hope and without God.

But Paul goes deeper into the logic and reason that the Corinthians crave. He speaks of one of their favorite poets Menander, for this man said: “***Bad company ruins good morals***” (1 Corinthians 15:33). This is profoundly true. False doctrine fosters loose morals. Here, Paul is urging them and us to not be deceived as we live in the world without hope and without God, that we don’t become like the world. He says this to their shame – *and our shame* – because although they are Christians, they do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God.

So, don’t lean on your own understanding, but trust in God and the sure promise revealed in His Word. We cannot reason the resurrection. We can only have faith in the resurrection.

“But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?’” (1 Corinthians 15:35) Or they may ask it this way: *“How can a corpse which has been reduced to dust or ashes be raised to life again?”* For the Greeks then, and the unbelieving world today, the concept of a decomposed person coming back to life was a sheer impossibility. Like the Greeks then and the unbelieving world today, they were inclined to scoff.

But from these questions, the Holy Spirit leads Paul into giving us the most complete commentary on our bodily resurrection! He says: ***“What you sow does not come to life unless it dies”*** (1 Corinthians 15:36).

Essentially, you will find the answer to our bodily resurrection by observing your own garden, or for many, your own farm field. Paul is saying: *“From your everyday experience in horticulture you can observe the necessary cycle that a seed must first die before it is made alive.”*

Martin Luther puts it this way: *“The cemetery or burial ground does not indicate a heap of the dead, but a field full of kernels, known as God’s kernels, which will verdantly blossom forth and grow more beautifully than can be imagined.”*¹

So, at His Coming, Christ will raise us up, just as flowers, corn, and beans are grown from dead seeds. So, when death occurs a person is buried – or planted – like a seed in the cemetery. The body awaits the new life that will burst forth in the resurrection!

Oddly enough, the English word “cemetery” comes from a Greek word meaning “sleeping room.” So, the risen Christ is now the ***“firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”*** (1 Corinthians 15:20).

[Our Resurrection Body]

Then the next question is *“What will our resurrection body look like?”* Well, the resurrection body will be the same, yet gloriously different. We will be as God created us, but better!

¹ Martin Luther. *Luther’s Works* 28:178.

The Lord who created our physical bodies will give us glorious, spiritual bodies. Our bodies in their present condition will be changed in a flash: no longer full of lusts, no longer sinful, no longer limited by hunger, thirst, pain, or mortality. We will have real bodies free from sin!

In the meantime, unless Christ comes first, we will all die, due to sin. But when we die, we die in hope knowing that we are God's seeds sown only to rise again at the coming of Christ, because He lived, died, and rose again from the dead for us! The fear of death may cause us to deny death or even try to ignore it. But Jesus said, "***I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though He dies***" (John 11:25), so we can face death with peace and confidence.

We know that there is more to come! Our bodies will be placed in a grave, but one day – "***in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, at the sound of the last trumpet***" (1 Corinthians 15:52) – that grave will be as empty as the grave of Jesus! Our mortal bodies buried will be the immortal body raised just as it was for Jesus! Amen!

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep you hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠