



Sermon, May 14, 2017  
Rev. Dr. Craig S. Pesti-Strobel  
Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

## Christ's Resurrection and Ours

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 15:1-26, 35-58

15:1 Now I should remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, <sup>2</sup>through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

<sup>3</sup>For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>4</sup>and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup>Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. <sup>7</sup>Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup>Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. <sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. <sup>11</sup>Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

<sup>12</sup>Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup>If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; <sup>14</sup>and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. <sup>15</sup>We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup>For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. <sup>17</sup>If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup>Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup>If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. <sup>20</sup>But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. <sup>21</sup>For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; <sup>22</sup>for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. <sup>23</sup>But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup>Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup>For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup>The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

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### The Resurrection Body

<sup>35</sup>But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' <sup>36</sup>Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup>And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. <sup>38</sup>But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. <sup>39</sup>Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. <sup>40</sup>There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. <sup>41</sup>There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory. <sup>42</sup>So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. <sup>43</sup>It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. <sup>44</sup>It is sown a physical

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body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup>Thus it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup>But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. <sup>47</sup>The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. <sup>48</sup>As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup>Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

<sup>50</sup> What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. <sup>51</sup>Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, <sup>52</sup>in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. <sup>53</sup>For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup>When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' <sup>55</sup> 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' <sup>56</sup>The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup>But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.

**As I have been putting together this sermon series on the resurrection, I have to admit to finding myself in a bit of a quandary. It has to do with the resurrection of the body. Not just Jesus' body – but all of our bodies. Turn with me in your hymnals to #880, 881 and 882, three historical Affirmations of Faith. Notice how each of them affirm two things:**

- 1. Jesus shall come to judge the living and the dead, and**
- 2. We believe in the resurrection of the dead, or of the body, depending on which creed you are reading.**

**These are ancient and foundational declarations of the Christian Faith. They all refer to the life that is to come after death. Orthodox, traditional, ancient, authoritative Christian teaching has always declared that at the end of time (whenever that is) Christ will return, and the dead will be resurrected bodily, to be judged, and then whoever is still living will be judged. All well and good.**

**However, not many of us actually believe this, I suspect. My experience having performed many funerals is that most people today, including devout Christians, believe more like this: when we die, our soul and spirit leaves our bodies behind, ascend to heaven (wherever that is), and join with those who have preceded us in death. For those who believe in hell, some people who have led especially wicked and unrepentant lives might find themselves there. All of this is quite different from the creeds we just**

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read. This second description is of a strictly disembodied, non-physical afterlife.

So how are we to square this with what Paul so adamantly affirms in his letter to the Corinthians: "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.... For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied."

Paul is saying that Christ was resurrected because resurrection is something that can and will happen to us all. And it will be a bodily resurrection of some sort.

If you still have your hymnals out, turn to hymn # 302, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today." Verses 2 and 3 trace the gospel story in miniature. And then in verse 4 comes the punch: "Soar we now where Christ has led/ Following our exalted Head, / Made like him, like him we rise, / Ours the cross the grave, the skies." This is precisely what Paul is saying. We are like Christ in every humanly way possible, and because he was resurrected, so shall we be resurrected.

But then there is that thorny question, in what form will we be resurrected? In what body? And why must we be in a body? And what is meant by "body?" Paul's answer and comments here are very interesting, because it becomes clear that he is not talking about reassembling our battered and bruised bodies, or that we become animated corpses. No, he is referring to a glorified sort of body that nonetheless has a direct continuity with our previous existence.

Here we are dealing with Semitic wholeness – soul and body are a unity, thus we are judged in the form of the body in which we lived our lives.

Salvation is of the whole totality of human beings. Thus what one does in their body and with their body is of utmost importance. Hence Jesus' teaching about judging a person by their fruits is significant – salvation

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and repentance, etc. must always affect the actions of an embodied person, and must be manifested in concrete, physical actions and deeds. Mere words are not enough, nor is the simple adherence to doctrine or particularly "correct" thought or ideas.

This is the whole thrust of Jesus' teachings in the Gospels – how we live our lives in community with one another, the character of our lives, and how we live as caretakers of God's creation – this is what Jesus stressed, not doctrines or dogma or correct opinions. Belief in Jesus means to place your trust in him, to make his concerns your concerns, his commitments your commitments, to invite his Spirit, the Holy spirit, to come and dwell in your life and to transform your life according to the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. That is what believing in Jesus is all about.

That is what Paul is getting at here when he says in verse 49: "And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven." Belief in Jesus Christ changes us, transforms us, changes our priorities according to God's priorities. This change is manifested outwardly in our lives.

Jim Wallis in his book, *The Call to Conversion* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), writes the following: "When I was a university student, I was unsuccessfully evangelized by almost every Christian group on campus. My basic response to their preaching was, 'How can I believe when I look at the way the church lives?' They answered, 'Don't look at the church; look at Jesus.' I now believe that statement is one of the saddest in the history of the church. It puts Jesus on a pedestal apart from the people who name his name. Belief in him becomes an abstraction removed from any demonstration of its meaning in the world. Such thinking is a denial of what is most basic to the gospel: incarnation. People should be able to look at the way we live and begin to understand what the gospel is about. Our lives must tell them who Jesus is and what he cares about." (p. 108)

The resurrection of the body proclaims to us that what we do in our bodies and with our bodies, what we do as embodied beings, is at the

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very center of salvation. It is at the very center of God's action in our lives. It is at the center of the Christian faith. And that is why in these ancient Christian creeds, at the coming of Christ to judge the living and the dead, that we are judged in the very bodies in which we lived our lives, committed all the acts and deeds we committed, said all the things we did, loved all whom we loved or abused all whom we abused, mistreated all we mistreated or helped all whom we helped. The resurrection of the body tells us that what we do here and now in this life matters. So, look at where you are going with your life, and how you are living.

The power of the resurrection of our bodies is that we can start living a God-infused life here and now. The soul and body function as a unity, here and now. Death is not an escape from this world. This is the world that Christ put on when he took flesh. He put on the flesh of this world not to rescue or take us out of this world – that is Greek Gnosticism – but he came to transform our lives in this world, and to restore all of creation. “All of creation is groaning in travail, in labor pains;” “the creation will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the kingdom of God.”

This is the exact parallel with how Paul describes the resurrection bodies – raised in glory, imperishable, no longer subject to decay or death.

What we do *with* this world matters because it is *into this world* that we are resurrected, and it is *in this world* that we are judged according to *how we lived in this world* while we were alive.

Final story: First I was dying to finish high school and start college. And then I was dying to finish college and start working. And then I was dying to marry and have children. And then I was dying for my children to grow old enough for school so I could return to work. And then I was dying to retire. And now, I am dying .... And suddenly I realize I forgot to live. (-Anonymous).

And that's what the resurrection of the Body is also all about. It is not about dying. It is all about living. So, live a life that matters, because it matters how you live.