

Raised in Glory

Scriptures: Genesis 45:3-11,15; 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-57

## Fundamentals of Our Faith

Over the previous six weeks we've focused primarily on what it means to be the body of Christ, which took a look at the fundamentals of our faith. We've been focused on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and what that means for us. Today we'll look at the promise we have in His resurrection, and next week we'll wrap up when we talk about His transfiguration and showing all His glory to some of the apostles. Today we're going to continue to talk about a central fact of Christianity, which separates it from all other belief systems in the world – the resurrection of Emmanuel, God-with-us, on Easter morning. If you brought your Bible with you, or have a Bible app handy, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-57. I'll be reading from the New International Version this morning. **Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-57.**

Last week we heard about Paul telling some people in the ancient church that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a real, historical event, and how we had to center our faith in that, otherwise our faith was worthless. In those days, there were a couple groups in the Jewish faith, well-known to us today, who had differing views about what the resurrection was, or if there was one. In the gospel accounts Jesus butts heads over and over with the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Sadducees didn't believe in anything beyond this life. With that kind of outlook, I guess their name really fits them! Pretty sad, you see? Well, apparently some of their ideas were carried over into the ancient church at Corinth.

Paul begins examining the resurrection in today's passage by asking a couple of the questions he was hearing from the people in Corinth, which certainly sound like questions Sadducees would ask about it. These questions almost remind me of the time when they asked Jesus who the widow would be married to after she'd been married to each of seven brothers who had all died without producing offspring in Matthew 22:23-33. Paul says, "But someone may ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?'" (1 Cor. 15:35). Those sound like questions Pharisees or Sadducees would ask, just to try to trip people up.

## How Could the Dead Possibly Be Raised?

The point they were trying to get at, which we lose in translation, is more along the lines of, "How could the dead possibly be raised?" We're out here in the country. Over the years, I've seen my share of roadkill, and I bet you have, too. Sometimes you'll see a dead opossum or raccoon, and they'll bloat up so big that they look like a balloon ready to pop. They're decomposing – rotting from the inside out. If, by some unfortunate event, you happen to hit the carcass – I've done that before – and then look in the rear-view mirror, you may see a leg, or some other body part, has been

flung to the other side of the road. These Sadducee type folks in the ancient church were trying to tell other people at the church in Corinth that it was impossible to gather and reassemble the decomposed parts of a dead body.

We know that's something we don't do – we can't do. It's something right out of Sci-Fi stuff. I like Sci-Fi, but this sort of Sci-Fi is the creepy, weird stuff, and I'm not really a fan of that kind of thing. It's the stuff that Mary Shelley wrote about in 1818, when she wrote her novel, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. You probably have seen some sort of film adaptation of the book at some point. Our younger people may be more into the whole idea of zombies. Several years ago, Kendra and I worked with a lady who was crazy about zombies. Her and her boyfriend even dressed up as characters and went on a Caribbean cruise for *The Walking Dead*. A lot of people like watching that sort of stuff.

The people asking the questions in Paul's day had a misunderstanding of what the resurrection body would be like. What's worse is, these people weren't really trying to find answers in Scripture, they were trying to plant doubts in new believers' minds so they could fall away from the faith. And Paul doesn't mince words. He tells it like it is. "How foolish!" he says in verse 36, "What you sow does not come to life unless it dies." What Paul does in the next few verses is nothing short of brilliant. He compares the physical human body we're living in right now, to other, things we see in the natural world.

### **Like a Seed**

"When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as He has determined, and to each kind of seed He gives its own body," Paul says next (verses 37 and 38). Paul uses the metaphor of various kinds of plant seeds to symbolize these physical bodies. He specifically mentions wheat. I think that's worth pointing out. What do we do with wheat? It's food – it's used to sustain and nourish. Friends, that's what we're called to do as Jesus' followers in the world today – to feed, to sustain, and nourish a world suffering in perpetual spiritual poverty and starvation because it doesn't yet know it's Creator and Redeemer. We're called to make Him known!

In the verses we skipped this morning, Paul drives this metaphor home. He talks about different kinds of animal life, and even different kinds of celestial objects in space, which God has created from physical matter. They are all created from physical materials, yet each of them have very different and unique characteristics. "This is my Father's world: I rest me in the thought of rocks and trees, of skies and seas; His hand the wonders wrought."<sup>1</sup>

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1 Maltbie Babcock, "This is my Father's World," *The United Methodist Hymnal*. (United Methodist Publishing House: Nashville), 1989, page 144.

Picking back up at verses 42 through 44, Paul says, “So it will be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.” The physical body we’re currently living in will eventually wear out and die. It’s perishable. When we die, and we’ve loved and followed Jesus Christ, He brings us to be with Him – He raises us imperishable. As His followers, there will be no end to our existence. All the descriptors Paul gives us here are antonyms – they’re polar opposites of each other. Perishable things rot, imperishable things last forever. Dishonor is renewed in glory. Weakness springs up into power and strength. The natural, physical body, is resurrected as a spiritual body.

### **Natural and Spiritual**

The idea of natural and spiritual may be confusing. Broadly speaking, the natural body is characterized by sin. We hear the word “spirit,” and tend to think of vapory ghostly figures, but that’s not what Paul had in mind when he first put pen to paper. He recalls those eyewitness accounts – all those people who saw Jesus Christ after He rose from the dead – and He wasn’t a ghost! He was a real, touchable, living body. His resurrection body was different than our physical bodies. In the gospel accounts, He walked through walls, and could appear and disappear at will. That seems sort of ghost-like, except that He invited Thomas to put his fingers in the nail holes and in His side, and in another instance, He ate with some of the disciples. Jesus’ resurrection body is living, breathing perfection.

“So it is written: ‘The first man Adam became a living being;’ the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first; but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven,” Paul tells us in verses 45 through 47. The last Adam, and the second man, from heaven, Paul’s referring to is Jesus Christ. The first Adam, or the first man, is Adam, who we know in history as the one who ate the forbidden fruit and disobeyed God. Sin and death enter into the world through Adam’s disobedience, and it’s conquered by Christ’s death and resurrection! Paul’s showing us that as human beings, we start from a point of need – the whole world is in desperate need of a Savior – and that’s why Jesus came.

I know you’re able to see the great brokenness and pain, especially here in our country. Until a decade ago or so, people still had this camaraderie, a common view of themselves, as Americans. We’d split on party lines around September or October, have November elections, and within a few months of Inauguration Day, we were all Americans again. We haven’t had that in the last two Presidential elections. There are Christians out there who self-identify as Democrats, who spend more time talking about Joe Biden than they do about Jesus Christ. The same can be said on the flip side – there are Christians out there who self-identify as Republicans, who spend more

time talking about Donald Trump than they do about Jesus Christ. Our focus is off the spiritual Man – Jesus Christ – and on the earthly man.

### **Be Imitators of Christ**

“As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the Man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the Man from heaven,” (verses 48 and 49). Paul was telling the Corinthian Church – he’s telling us today – that we need to be imitators of Jesus Christ. I look at the Scriptures, and you know something I frequently see, in both Old and New Testament stories? God does things very differently than us. God looks at people differently than we do. When God sends Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint Jesse’s son as King of Israel in place of Saul, in 1 Samuel 16, Samuel sees David’s older brother, “Eliab and thought, ‘Surely the Lord’s anointed stands here before the Lord.’ But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’” (1 Sam. 16:6-7). We see that in the gospels, too. Jesus constantly butts heads with the political and religious establishment, to the point that they finally decide to work together to crucify Him.

Paul tells us, “I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable,” (1 Cor. 15:50). There are a lot of carnal, or earthly Christians out there who think all they have to do is say they believe in Him, and do nothing else. Friends, that kind of a faith isn’t going to save them. He expects us to let Him reign in our hearts. He loves us enough to die on the cross in our place, but He loves us too much to leave us there. When we accept that He paid the price – He bought us – we ought to want to become more and more like Him.

### **A Great Promise**

The lectionary reading for the week ends with verse 50 of our text, but I wanted to briefly look at verses 51-57 with you this morning, because it contains one of the greatest promises we have in Holy Scripture. I used a piece of this last week towards the end of the sermon, and want to look at it a little closer this morning with you. I have used this chunk of text in every celebration of life service I’ve officiated, because it’s so amazingly comforting. And as I read it, I think of those saints that we’ve known and buried together here over the last nineteen months – Bob Morris, Delbert Doak, Royal Cotterman, and Keith Motter. You’ve heard it once this morning from the New International Version, I’m going to switch over to the New Revised Standard Version, because that’s what’s in our *Book of Worship* in the section they title as “A Service of Death and Resurrection:”

“Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, 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. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 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.”

“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, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor. 15:51-57, NRSV).

At some point, Jesus is going to come back, and His followers in that day will not die, but will change in an instant, and put on imperishability, just like we would put on a new set of clothes. And the whole Church will be together, with Christ. Paul talks about the law here – he’s referring to the Old Testament. All those commandments and rules that we still read, and see how very far off the mark people fall when we try to go it alone. That’s why we need Jesus. The whole world needs Him. We’re called to spread the news. Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen!

**Prayer:** From Your mouth, O God, come mercy and righteousness, and out of the abundance of Your heart You have given us Your Word made flesh, Jesus the Christ. Pour out Your Spirit of integrity upon us, that all we say and do may befit a people made in Your image, and baptized into the dying and rising of Your Son. Amen.