

YOUR RESURRECTION

1 Corinthians 15:21-42

The Transfiguration of Our Lord (Series C)

March 3, 2019

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The epistle lesson comes from *Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians*, chapter 15, verses 21 through 42. It is on page 815 of the pew Bible.

This reading is a continuation of the one from two Sundays ago, and so the sermon will be a bit of a continuation as well. Two weeks ago we focused primarily on the certainty of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, and a little bit on what that guarantees for us. It means that Christ's crucifixion was an acceptable sacrifice for our sins, and we can be certain that we will also be raised. If you missed that sermon, you can always find it on our website. This week we will focus more on those benefits, particularly the last one, that we will also be raised from the dead.

Please stand as you are able for God's Holy Word. From 1 Corinthians 15, beginning at verse 21, we read in Jesus' name.

²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. ²⁸ When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

²⁹ Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? ³⁰ Why are we in danger every hour? ³¹ I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! ³² What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." ³³ Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." ³⁴ Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

³⁵ But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" ³⁶ You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. ³⁹ For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. ⁴⁰ There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly

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is of another. ⁴¹ There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

⁴² So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear saints, we have enemies. The Scriptures speak of three primary enemies we have. And perhaps I shouldn't just say, "Dear saints," but, "Dear humans," because whether you believe in Jesus or not, you still have these three enemies. The difference is whether or not you have a Savior from them.

Our three enemies are these: sin, death, and the devil. These enemies are, of course, related. We see this in Genesis 3, where the chief enemy, the devil, tempted our first parents to rebel against God, causing sin and death to spread to all men.

So, since the devil is the origin of the other two, he is the chief enemy. I've always heard Lutherans list these three enemies in the same order: sin, death, and the devil. But I wonder if, perhaps, we should move the devil to the front of the list, since he is the first enemy, and put death at the end, since that is the last enemy to be destroyed (15:26). Maybe we'll start a new thing: the devil, sin, and death. Probably not, because five hundred years of tradition is hard to break. But just know this: the devil is the first enemy.

The second enemy is sin. Of the three enemies, we seem to have the most trouble accepting the reality of this one. That's because it hits the closest to home. Even though it's unfashionable to believe that the devil exists, it's even more unfashionable to believe that I am part of the problem. Maybe we're more willing to believe the devil exists if we can blame our problems on him instead of us. But we are part of the problem too. Our enemy is within us. More than that, our enemy is our very own nature. This is hard to accept, especially when everything in our culture teaches us to follow our hearts. But if we listen to our conscience, instead of our sinful hearts, we will soon find this to be true. We are our own enemies.

And then the last enemy is death. Unlike the first two, this one is easy to believe. Every sane person with a shred of human dignity knows that death is bad. And it's impossible to ignore death, because there is at least one moment in every person's life when death makes its reality known to us. The last enemy—death—is quite obvious.

So these are our three basic enemies: the devil, sin, and death.

In the face of these enemies, Jesus appears as a warrior, a champion, an invincible army of one.

At first he doesn't look so powerful. That's because humiliation comes before his exaltation. He's born in poverty, he suffers, he is crucified, he dies, and he is buried. This is necessary, because, in order to lift us up out of our sorry state, he has to get down into it and accept it as his own. So he accepts our sin as his own, and he even suffers death with us and for us. To the world it looks like defeat, but he does this on purpose so that when he is exalted, he can carry us with him.

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Then, after his humiliation is complete, his exaltation can begin. It begins, actually, with his descent into hell, where he proclaimed his victory. Then it continues with his resurrection, his ascension into heaven, his reign over all things at the right hand of God, and it will reach fulfillment in his return to raise the dead and judge all mankind.

The last of these steps is the focus today. At his coming, he will bring to life all those who belong to him. Think about that, and let it sink in. Paul is saying that death is not the end. All those who belong to Christ will live. And he's not just talking about your spirit. He's talking about your body. And he's not talking about some different body that God will give to you. He is talking about this body. We can call it a new body, because it will be made new, but it will not be a different body. Jesus will raise this body. Yes, the one with the sore knee, the bad heart, the fat gut, and the crooked nose. You might not like this body very much, or maybe you do; I don't know. But unless you die at a very young age, everyone reaches the point in life where there is something about their body they don't like anymore. It could be the way it looks or the way it works, but at some point, everyone becomes discontent with their physical body.

So I often hear Christians say, "I'm really looking forward to my new body." And I say, "Yeah, it'll be new, but it won't be a different body." And sometimes they say, "Yeah, yeah, I know; quit being a smarty pants." Other times they're a little more confused, or even a bit disappointed, because it's hard to imagine how "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (15:52), this body will be changed forever. It sounds like a diet plan that's just way too good to be true. We're used to our bodies getting weaker and uglier as time goes on, so it's hard to imagine that these broken vessels will be made whole and perfect. But this is what God promises us. And believe me, if God can take your dead body and bring it back to life, he won't have any problem making it work right. This body is the one you will have for eternity.

How do we know this? Simple; because Jesus kept his body, and he is the pattern for our resurrection. That's what Paul means when he calls Jesus the "firstfruits" (15:22). In his resurrection, Jesus wasn't given a different body. He kept his body. It was the same back that had been ripped open with a scourge, the same head that had been sliced with thorns, the same hands and feet that had been nailed to a tree, and the same side that had been punctured with a spear. It was all the same body, but it was repaired and glorified. This is how we will be raised. And never mind if your body is decomposed to the point where there is nothing left but dust. The same God who made the first man out of dust can find the dust that belongs to your body and put you back together again.

The physical creation is good, and your body is good, because God made it. The problem is that sin dwells within us, and our bodies are subject to death. That's what all of our physical infirmities are. We can classify them all under the category of death. Death is not simply that terminal moment at the end of life when the heart stops beating, the lungs stop breathing, and the brain stops sending impulses. Death also includes all the weakness, sickness, and injury that leads up to that terminal moment. So when Jesus comes again to destroy death, he won't just undo that terminal event. He will also eradicate all the death that leads up to it. With resurrection, there also comes transformation.

This is what it means for death to be destroyed. "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (15:26). It's not just that death will stop. To destroy death means that all the gains death had made throughout the entire history of the world will be taken back by Jesus. The deaths of all those who fell asleep in Jesus Christ: undone. Our deaths, that is, if Jesus waits long enough for

us to die: undone. All of the weakness, sickness, and injury that plagues us during this earthly life: undone. Dear saints, this is what we look forward to on the Last Day.

Paul compares this to a seed that is sown in the ground. I suppose the analogy has limitations. Every analogy does, otherwise it wouldn't be an analogy anymore, but the thing itself. So we look for the points of comparison without stretching it too far. And the comparison is quite marvelous. Just like a seed, a dead body goes into the ground. And you don't expect much to happen, especially if you've never seen something like this happen before, but something does happen. Something comes out of the ground, and it comes from that seed or that dead body that was placed there, and it far exceeds the glory of what went into the ground. What was once dead is now alive, and it is more alive than it ever has been. It is sown perishable, but it is raised imperishable. Not only is it alive again, but it is alive forever. It cannot and will not die again.

So what difference does this make for us now? Why should we care? How does it affect our lives today? It should be a great encouragement to us.

Certain future events have a way of drastically changing our mindset and behavior in the present, especially when they are significant events. If you are engaged to be married, you don't just ignore your wedding date until it arrives. You look forward to it with great anticipation, and you make plans for it. You might even be more inclined to go to the gym, all because you know the day is coming. Or if you're struggling through a long semester of school work, and especially when you get to finals week, you look forward to the last day of school. Maybe it's even your graduation year. You look forward to that final event, because it reminds you why you're suffering through all the work now. Certain future events shape the way we think and live in the present.

This is most true for the Christian life, because the Christian life is also filled with suffering. One of the most common misconceptions regarding Christianity is that it's supposed to make our lives better. It's not. Sometimes it does, and some things are better, but it can also lead to great suffering. If our hope in Jesus Christ is based on this life only, this Christian life just isn't worth it. It certainly wouldn't be worth going outside on a Sunday morning when it's fifteen below. Better to stay in bed. If our hope is in this life only, we will give up on this whole Jesus thing when people start to ridicule, persecute, or even kill us. But, if the dead are raised, and if God promises to raise us from the dead, then any amount of suffering we endure is just a minor inconvenience compared to the glory to be revealed on the Last Day.

Paul says, "What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.' " (15:32). There is actually wisdom in that ... if the dead are not raised. The world says, "Live in the moment. Do what feels good. Follow your heart." That's good advice ... if the dead are not raised. But if the dead are raised, then today is not the most important day. So repent of your sins. Believe in Christ. Abstain from wickedness. Rejoice in suffering. Love your neighbor. Look ahead to the future. Whatever we have to endure now is only momentary. It seems difficult at the time, because this life is all we know. But when you look back on it, it will seem like nothing.

The dead are raised. How do we know this? Because Jesus was raised from the dead, just as he said he would. And if he can rise from the dead, he can also raise you from the dead, just as

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he says he will. Dear Christians, this is our hope. This is not some kind of wishful thinking sort of hope; this is our sure and certain hope, because your God and Savior, who was crucified for your transgression, has passed through death, and he is returning to take you with him. The last enemy, death, will be destroyed. Amen.

He who testifies to these things says, **“Surely I am coming soon.”** Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with [you] all. Amen. (Rev. 22:20-21)