

# YOU WILL BE RAISED

1 Corinthians 15:21-26, 30-42

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany (Series C)

February 20, 2022

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The epistle lesson for the Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany comes from *Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians*, chapter 15, verses 21 through 26 and 30 through 42. Please stand as you are able for God's holy Word. From 1 Corinthians 15, beginning at verse 21, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule 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. ...

<sup>30</sup> Why are we in danger every hour? <sup>31</sup> I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! <sup>32</sup> 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." <sup>33</sup> Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." <sup>34</sup> 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.

<sup>35</sup> But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" <sup>36</sup> You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup> And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, 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> For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. <sup>40</sup> There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. <sup>41</sup> 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.

<sup>42</sup> 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.

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We're picking up where we left off last week, so we should review a little bit. Last week we looked at the first part of 1 Corinthians 15. We spent quite a bit of time on apologetics, that is, the defense of the Christian faith. 1 Corinthians 15 is one of the primary texts in the Bible for Christian apologetics, because it lays out the evidence for Jesus' resurrection. And it does it in a legal format, much like a lawyer would do in a trial.

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We talked about how the Christian faith is falsifiable. And I should be careful when I say that. I do not mean that the Christian faith is false. On the contrary, it is very much true. When we say that the Christian faith is falsifiable, we simply mean that if it were false, someone could prove it to be false. Christianity makes claims that can be investigated. We're not asking people to accept the Christian Gospel on blind faith. You can investigate it.

In this way, Christianity is unique among the religions of the world. Most other religions cannot be tested. Islam, for example, depends on the claim that their god, Allah spoke to Mohammed in secret. Can anyone prove this did not happen? No. But that also means that no one can prove it did. Mohammed is the only person who really knew whether or not he was telling the truth. Mormonism, or the so-called "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," is very similar. Their entire religion depends on the claim that the angel Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith and gave him some golden plates, from which he translated *The Book of Mormon*. But, again, this visit supposedly occurred in secret, and there is no evidence that any gold plates ever existed, even though this was only two-hundred years ago. Joseph Smith is the only person who really knew whether or not he was telling the truth. We could go through every major religion of the world and find a similar case. It's either a matter of accepting that a certain person speaks for God, without any falsifiable evidence, or it's a matter of simply feeling something in your heart, which no one outside of you can question. Other religions are not falsifiable, which means they also cannot be verified.

The only notable exception to this is Judaism. The Old Testament is filled with public miracles that occurred in specific places. And it's no coincidence that Christianity also accepts the Old Testament.

But the biggest and most falsifiable claim in Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus. No other religion has anything like this. It was a public miracle with hundreds of eyewitnesses, and it was immediately reported far and wide. Furthermore, it's the sort of thing that, if it holds true, proves that Jesus is who he says he is, the Son of God, and he knows what he's talking about.

Now "falsifiability" is a seven-syllable word, and I realize that some of this might go over your head. That's my fault, not yours. But every Christian should have at least a basic level of understanding of this. We should all be prepared to give a defense for the hope that is in us (1 Pet. 3:15). So here's the most basic level of apologetics, and every Christian should be able to handle this: If someone asks you something like, "Why are you a Christian?" or, "Why do you believe Christianity is true?" answer, "Because Jesus rose from the dead." And if they ask, "How do you know that?" you say, "Because there were hundreds of eyewitnesses." They might have more questions, and you can dig deeper to be able to answer those questions. But that's the most basic level of Christian apologetics, and most non-Christians have never even heard something like that.

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So we're talking about the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a historical fact. This is the kind of event that changes everything. And it has massive implications for what we believe. The resurrection of Jesus is the event that holds all of Christian doctrine together. If it's false, then the apostle Paul says, "Your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (15:17). But if Christ has been raised from the dead, and indeed he has, then we can and should have confidence in the doctrine the Bible teaches.

And there are two doctrines that are especially linked to Jesus' resurrection. These two doctrines are the sweetest Gospel promises. The first one is the forgiveness of sins. We talked about this last week. The resurrection does not forgive our sins, but it proves that Jesus'

crucifixion did. “He bore our sins in his body” (1 Peter 2:24). “He is the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:2). “God made him to be sin” (2 Cor. 5:7). “God condemned sin in [his] flesh” (Rom. 8:3). “Christ died for our sins.” How do we know this is true? How do we know the sacrifice of Jesus was really acceptable to the Father? Because God raised him from the dead. If Jesus had died and stayed dead, we would have to ask, *Did it work?* Probably not. The resurrection of Jesus is the Father’s justification of Jesus. It’s an action that speaks louder than a thousand words. By raising him from the dead, God declares that Jesus is righteous, and his sacrifice is righteous. And by justifying Jesus, God the Father also justifies you. God the Father is pleased with you. He declares that you are righteous. And you know this because the one who sacrificed himself for you lives.

Sometimes we look for assurance in our own behavior. This is our natural temptation, and it’s wrong. If our behavior is good, we think God must be pleased with us. Even if we accept forgiveness, we still might force our good works into it somehow. We might think of them as the proof that we are really forgiven. If my behavior improves, it must mean that forgiveness worked, and if my behavior doesn’t improve, then forgiveness must not have worked. This entire way of thinking is wrong.

Or we might look to our faith. This sounds a little more Christian, but it’s really not. We ask ourselves, *Do I believe this firmly and sincerely enough?* This is also wrong, because this is not really faith in Jesus, but faith in our own faith. All this really is, is asking ourselves if we feel forgiven. But feelings have nothing to do with it. Faith does not look to itself; faith looks to Christ alone.

The only place to look, where we will actually get the right answer, is to Jesus Christ. Did Christ die for your sins? Yes. Did God raise him from the dead? Yes. And are you baptized into Jesus’ death and resurrection? This is how we know we are forgiven. Do not look to yourself. Look to Christ.

So the forgiveness of sins is the first of two doctrines that are especially linked to Jesus’ resurrection. The second one, I gave you as homework. Last week I asked you to read the rest of chapter 15 and figure out what it is. I don’t know if you did your homework or not, but here’s the answer: your resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is the proof that you, too, will be raised from the dead.

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At Christ’s 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 achy tooth, the weak heart, and the pimples that keep coming back. 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 the older we get, the less content we become with our bodies.

So Christians sometimes say, “I can’t wait to be free of this body.” That’s a bad thing to say, because you won’t be free of this body. For a time you probably will be, but certainly not forever. Or someone might say, “I’m really looking forward to my new body.” That’s a bit better, as long as we understand that rightly. Your new body will not be a different body. It will be this body, raised and transformed. “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (15:52), this

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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. 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.

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So what difference does this make for us now? Why should we care? How does it affect our lives today? This life is filled with suffering. And being a Christian doesn't change this. 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 wintery Sunday morning. 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.

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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.

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

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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)