

# THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY; AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING

John 5:10-29

Sixth Wednesday in Lent

April 9, 2025

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to John*, chapter 5, verses 19 through 29. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From John 5, beginning at verse 19, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>19</sup> So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. <sup>20</sup> For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. <sup>21</sup> For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. <sup>22</sup> For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, <sup>23</sup> that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. <sup>24</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

<sup>25</sup> “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. <sup>26</sup> For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. <sup>27</sup> And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup> Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice <sup>29</sup> and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”

*Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that, by patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

You may be seated.

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“I believe ... in the Resurrection of the body; and the Life everlasting. Amen.” This is the greatest thing. This is our blessed hope: that our God and Savior Jesus Christ will appear in glory, he who gave himself into death in order to redeem us and purify us for himself (Titus 2:13-14). And on that day of his appearance, we will be raised from the dead. These bodies will rise. And the Lord and Giver of Life, the Holy Spirit, will breathe everlasting life into our once mortal bodies. And we will live, like never before, and forever. This is the greatest thing, and it is our blessed hope.

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When we say, “I believe,” this is to be a bold thing. When the world uses the word “believe,” they often mean something weak or unsure. When you ask someone about the forecast for the weekend, and they are unsure, but they’re trying to remember what they heard, they might say, “I believe it’s supposed to be decent.” Or if you talk to someone who’s really confident about

something, they might say, “I don’t believe so; I *know* so.” But faith, the way the Scriptures teach it, is not less than knowledge, but more than knowledge.

The old theologians speak of three components of faith: knowledge, assent, and trust (*notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*). Knowledge is knowing the facts of Christianity, including, especially, the historical details of Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection. Assent means that we agree with it. For example, we confess it in the creeds. And trust means that we depend on these facts to save us. Now, there are times in our lives, sometimes at the beginning or at the end, when our intellectual capacity limits our practical knowledge or our assent. But that does not nullify faith. We still depend on the same God, and he does not deny our faith because our brains are weak. Rather, what the old theologians meant was that faith, when it is developed in a mature person, has these three components: knowledge, assent, and trust. As Christian people, we are to grow up into these things

And the Scriptures teach these things. The Scriptures lay out all these details of history and doctrine, because God desires us to know these things. And the Scriptures teach us to confess these things as true. And the Scriptures teach us to depend on these truths for everlasting salvation.

The point I’m trying to make is that faith is not less than knowledge. It includes the knowledge of the facts about God. In the same way that we know Julius Caesar was the emperor of Rome, we know that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified and rose from the dead. Eyewitnesses reported it. Therefore, we also know that Jesus is the Son of God, and that our sins are forgiven. The Bible is, among other things, a history book, and we should read it as history. It imparts historical knowledge to us. If someone asks you if you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and if you want to give a more descriptive answer than simply “yes,” you could say, “Jesus is the Son of God, and I depend on him for salvation.” That’s what we should mean whenever we say, “I believe.” These things are true, and we trust them to save us.

When we understand faith this way, we can’t really say, “I believe that Julius Caesar ruled the Roman Empire.” Because we might know that to be true, but we don’t trust that historical knowledge to save. Or if someone asks, “Do you believe in the devil?” we can say, “There is a devil, but I don’t trust him to save me.” I believe in God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is true, and I depend on him. That’s faith. It’s not wishful thinking. It’s dependence on the truth. Even when our faith is weak, or I should say, when it *feels* weak, it is still strong, because it depends on the God who is real. The weakness of our trust or the limits of our knowledge do not diminish his reality or his strength. We depend on the God who is true.

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I say these things, especially tonight, because we are dealing with an article of our faith that seems too good to be true: “the Resurrection of the body; and the Life everlasting.” This is one of those articles of doctrine that, it seems to me anyway, the Church in the twentieth and now the twenty-first centuries has done a really poor job of confessing. And maybe it’s because it seems too good to be true, like we can’t really expect people to believe this is actually going to happen. So we might think of heaven as a body-less existence, or maybe we receive a different body. It could also be, and this is probably more of the spiritual problem, we have fallen in love with this world. We have more luxury and comfort than ever before, so we think less and long less for the world to come.

But this is the truth of Scripture: your body, every person’s body, will be raised from the dead when Jesus returns. And whoever believes in him will inherit eternal life. And I know I’m

repeating myself, but this seems so unbelievable that we need to repeat it: your body will be raised from the dead.

So think about your body. Look at your hands, the front and the back. Feel them. Think about the skin on them, the bones inside, the muscles, the tendons, the nerves, and the blood. Think about your toes, your toenails, your knees and hips. Think about your heart, lungs, stomach, brain, eyes, and ears. Unless Jesus appears first, all of this will die, just like everyone who came before us. Sometimes, especially when we're young, we feel like we will live forever, so we don't give much thought to it. But it's true. Unless Jesus appears first, this body will die. But, when Jesus does appear, this body will be raised. Hands and feet. Bones, tendons, muscles, nerves, arms, legs, heart, lungs, brain, eyes, and ears—all of it will be raised to life. Your body—this body—will live. But it will not be the same. It will be transformed.

We might wonder, how is this possible? Especially for those who died long ago. Even their bones have turned to dust. Others did not receive what we consider a “proper burial,” and their remains were scattered over the countryside and turned to dust. There's hardly anything left for God to resurrect. Remember that this is the same God who formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed life into him (Gen. 2:7). If God can do that, and if God can raise the dead, then he can find whatever dust is left of our bodies. And he can put those bones back together, and he can cause our flesh to form again, and he will breathe life into that flesh.

How do we know this is true? Because the Scriptures teach it. And what evidence do the Scriptures provide? Above all, the resurrection of Jesus. His resurrection is not a legend, but a historical fact. Easter is coming up, so we'll probably think about this some more then. But for now, at least, remember that hundreds of eyewitnesses testified that they saw Jesus after his resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:5). And these eyewitnesses had nothing personal to gain from their story. Instead, they were persecuted, arrested, beaten, or even killed for their testimony that Jesus rose from the dead. They testified of this because they saw it. They knew it to be true. So we, also, can know this to be true. And the confidence, or the trust that we have in this, is that we also will be raised from the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul speaks of Christ as “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). That is, we will be raised after the pattern of his resurrection. And our bodies will be transformed. “We shall not all sleep, but we shall 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 shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

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The Scriptures teach the resurrection in many places. I kept with our tradition and selected four Scriptures for tonight: a psalm, another Old Testament reading, an epistle, and a gospel text. But we could have had a hundred and four readings. We could have picked from about a dozen psalms, some of which we will hear during the Easter season. For other Old Testament lessons, we could have read again from Genesis 2, about how God breathed life into the dust he had fashioned into a man. There are several passages from Isaiah or other prophets. We could have read from Daniel 12, where the prophet explicitly declares that “many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). Or we could have read from Job 19, where Job declares his confidence that his redeemer lives and,

“After my skin has been thus destroyed,  
yet in my flesh I shall see God” (Job 19:26).

But we read from Ezekiel 37, where the LORD took the prophet to a valley of dry bones. And there are many things to learn from this passage. But I especially want you to notice the Holy Spirit's work in the resurrection of the dead. Ezekiel prophesied to the bones, and flesh came upon them, but they were not alive (37:7-8). So God told him to prophesy to the breath (37:9). And I'll remind you again, as we've talked about a few times during this series, that in both Hebrew and Greek, the word for "spirit" can also mean "breath" or "wind" (Hebrew: רוּחַ; Greek: πνεῦμα). So Ezekiel prophesied, and the breath, or Spirit came into the slain and they lived. And I especially want you to notice the promise that God makes to "the whole house of Israel," which includes you through Jesus Christ: "I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel" (37:12). And the land of Israel in the Old Testament is a shadow that looks forward to the new creation, the greater Promised Land. The LORD goes on, "I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live" (37:14). This prophecy of Ezekiel received its first fulfillment when God brought the Israelites out of Babylon and back into the land of Israel. But it also looks forward to its greater fulfillment when God brings all of his people out of their graves and into the new creation forever.

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I won't even try to estimate how many epistle lessons teach the resurrection. We could have read from 1 Corinthians 15, but we'll hear more of that during the Easter season. Or various places where Paul speaks of Baptism as the guarantee of our resurrection (Rom. 6:5; Col 2:12); Romans 8, where he speaks of the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:18-30); Titus 2, where Paul speaks of the appearance of Jesus as our blessed hope (Titus 2:11-14); 1 John 3, where John declares that when Jesus appears, "We shall be like him" (1 John 3:2); or Revelation 21 and 22, the last two chapters of the Bible, which speak of the new heaven and the new earth.

In the gospels, there are many other passages in which Jesus speaks of eternal life or the resurrection of the dead. Many of his parables teach about resurrection or the new creation. As evidence, we could consider any of the people he raised from the dead, like the widow's son in Luke 7 (Luke 7:11-17); Jairus' daughter in Luke 8 (Luke 8:40-56); or Lazarus in John 11 (John 11:1-44). Really, all of Jesus' healings are evidence that he has power over death. And, of course, we could consider the resurrection of Jesus from any of the four gospels.

So this doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is taught all over the Bible, not just in the New Testament, but also in the Old. And this is something that God directs us to meditate on often, and our hearts should be directed to look forward to the resurrection with great anticipation. At many times in our lives, even daily, this is something that Christians should think about and remember.

When a brother or sister in Christ dies, we can find comfort in the resurrection. As Saint Paul teaches in 1 Thessalonians 4, "That you may not grieve as others do who have no hope" (4:13). He does not forbid grieving. It is natural and good to grieve, because death is not God's good and gracious will for us. Jesus even grieved moments before he raised his friend Lazarus (John 11:35). But we grieve with hope. Paul goes on, "For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep" (4:14). We grieve with hope, because Jesus has passed through death. He died in order to take away sin and defeat death, which is the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23). And he rose victoriously over sin, death, and the devil. Therefore, he also has the power to bring us through death and into eternal life. So we look forward to the appearance of Christ on the Last Day. On that day, Paul says, "The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord" (4:16-17). Apparently

the Thessalonians were concerned about their loved ones who had died. They had an anticipation that Christ would return soon, and we should always have that anticipation, but they feared that those who had fallen asleep would miss it. But Paul assured them, before any of us join Christ in the new creation, all of the dead in Christ will be raised. So whether we live until that day or die, together we will see Christ when he appears again in glory. The resurrection is our sure and certain hope for our brothers and sisters who have fallen asleep.

When we age or get injured, and our bodies or minds fail us, we should find comfort in the resurrection. People keep telling me that getting old is no fun. And I kind of already know this. I'm forty-two, which is about half-way to old. And I hope that doesn't offend any eighty-four-year-olds; I think you already know that you're old. But I have this thing with my foot where it hurts if I stand too long. But if I sit too much, my hips and my back get sore. So I don't really have any good options, but I'm only half-way to old. And I know that everyone who is my age or older has something that gives them pain or doesn't work quite right. And when you feel that thing, whatever it is, you know what you should think of? The resurrection. For the most part, in this life, our bodies and minds don't get better. If we take one step forward, it's usually followed by one or two steps back. And that's depressing, especially when we come to accept that this is just the way our lives will be after a certain age. And if we think of this life only, if our hearts are in love with this world, then there's no hope. And that could make any of us depressed, if our hope is in this life. But, if our hope is in the resurrection, then we can confidently say, "This is just for a moment." And human beings can bear suffering if we know there is an end to it. And the resurrection is more than just the end of suffering; it is the beginning of glory. It will be the full realization of peace. We should think of it often. And by often, I mean at least daily. One way to accomplish that is to use the Apostles' Creed as part of your personal or family devotions.

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Finally, from the gospel lesson in John 5, we get Jesus' clear and straight-forward teaching about the resurrection. In verse 25 he speaks of "an hour that is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live." He speaks of something that is not off in the future, but is a present blessing. He means us who are dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), but the Holy Spirit makes us alive through the preaching of the Word. It's what Jesus spoke of in chapter three as the new birth. We often call it "repentance" or "conversion."

Then Jesus goes on to speak of an hour that is not here yet, but "is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" (5:28-29). This refers to the resurrection on the Last Day.

It is not only believers who will be raised, but all mankind will be raised from the dead. There are two different kinds of resurrection. One is "the resurrection of judgment." The other is "the resurrection of life." And Jesus says "the resurrection of judgement" is for "those who have done evil," while "the resurrection of life" is for "those who have done good." And this, of course, is true, because Jesus says it. But, if we are honest with ourselves, we know that we have done evil, and we do not deserve "the resurrection of life." How, then, can any of us be saved? Back in verse 24, Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." To believe in God means that we know he is true, we confess him, and we trust that he gave his Son for us. We trust that the righteousness of Jesus is ours. If, on the Last Day, you want to stand before Jesus in your own righteousness, he will see that you have done evil, and

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY; AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING (John 5:19-29)

you will receive “the resurrection of judgment.” But if you trust in his righteousness, you will be saved. More than merely saved from death, you will be rewarded with “the resurrection of life.”

If it depended on our deeds, there would be no point to the suffering of Christ, and Jesus would be speaking out of both sides of his mouth. But, in fact, Jesus was crucified for your sin, and he was raised to share his resurrection with you. It is his gracious will to forgive you, resurrect you from the dead, transform you, and bring you into his new creation forever. 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).