

RESURRECTION BODY

(Genesis 45:3-15; Psalm 37; 1 Corinthians 15:35-50; Luke 6:27-38)

Plant a seed in the soil, and if things work well a new plant will come up. Plant an acorn and there is even the possibility that an oak tree will grow! Why is it so? Does someone come along when no one is around and replace the seed or the acorn with something different? No, the potential for something new is already built in, as God designed things. The seed **becomes** the plant. The acorn **becomes** the tree. They are transformed. They are the same things, but they have become something new and wonderful.

We take things like this for granted. There is continuity and identity, but there is also transformation in so many sides of life. In our reading today from 1 Corinthians 15, Paul wants us to recognize the same sort of reality when we think about our hope as Christians.

In the first part of the chapter, Paul made clear that Jesus Christ truly rose from the dead. He went on to make clear that what happened to Jesus – his resurrection – points to what happens for all God's people after they die. As Jesus rose from death, so all followers of Jesus shall rise to a new and wonderful life.

Last week, we saw that as Christians, we don't believe that physical death is the end of everything for us. We don't believe that our soul, some vague part of us, is all that shall live on. We don't believe in reincarnation on planet earth. We believe in **resurrection**: the resurrection of the body, as we say in the Apostle's Creed.

This chapter was written by Paul to clarify questions that the Christians in Corinth had about these issues. He was also responding to people who found the whole idea of resurrection of the body too strange to take in. "Come on," some of them seemed to be saying. "The body is dead and buried. How can it be raised to life again? The idea is ridiculous." Many people say something like that today.

Of course, it is often easy to distort the truth and make it seem incredible. But Paul uses that illustration of the seed and the new plant which grows from it to show that the pattern is already there in creation. You start with something that doesn't look very significant, but it can be transformed into something living and wonderful.

Jesus was dead and buried. But God raised him to life, never to die again. He lives today and for eternity. And Paul is saying that what happened to Jesus gives an indication of what will happen to Jesus' followers. Yes, our earthly bodies will finish their time here on earth; they will be buried or cremated; but God will transform them into something new and wonderful.

Right now we have bodies that are designed for life in this world. They generally work fairly well, but not perfectly. That's the way things are in this world where things go wrong. Our bodies get sick or injured; they wear out. Not long ago some scientists were talking about the possibility of people living for 150 years or more. My reaction was "Why would I want to? I've seen enough to know that life is often not all that easy for most people after we reach a certain age. The problem is not just what we die from: it's so often the limitations and aches and pains and problems that we *live* with!" These bodies are certainly not designed for eternity.

We need a **new body** if we are going to live for eternity. Paul calls it a "spiritual body". He insists that we will have a body. Bodies are good things: we live in them, they provide the means for us to do things and to express who we are. Without our bodies we are less than we were, we are incomplete. John Brown's earthly body might be a-mouldering in the grave, but it is not just his soul that goes marching on. Paul would say that it is John Brown who is marching on in his resurrection body. In a sense the new improved bodily John Brown!

So Paul insists that as Jesus rose from death with a body, so we will be **embodied**. When he talks about a "spiritual" body, he is really saying that we will be empowered by the Holy Spirit, and our home is God's new world, that new heaven and new earth that we read about in the scriptures.

Remember that in his resurrection body, Jesus could still be seen and touched and recognized, he still ate food and cooked breakfast. However he was not always immediately recognized, and locked doors did not seem to prevent him being where he wanted to be. It was the same Jesus, and yet there was something new about him. Continuity and yet transformation, just as Paul describes here.

God is a God who loves variety. Paul points out that different creatures have their different bodies, just as even in the sky, the sun and moon and stars look different from each other. He was no expert on modern astronomy, but he could recognize that there were significant differences. And just as we now have bodies fitted for here and now, so we shall have new different transformed bodies fitted for eternity. Paul points out the contrasts.

Right now our body is perishable: the resurrection body is imperishable. Right now our body is prone to dishonour, for we are sinful people: the resurrection body is glorious, for we shall be free from sin. Right now our body is weak, prone to sickness and ageing and other problems: the resurrection body will have new power. Right now our body is merely physical: our resurrection body will be spiritual. No, I can't tell you all the details, but it will be just right for God's glorious kingdom.

Right now, we reflect Adam, that first man made of the dust of the earth, in the way we function and the way our bodies work. But the great news of the Gospel is that in the renewed creation we shall reflect the glory of the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our divine King and Saviour.

If that is our hope as Christians, what does that mean for us now? We live as people looking forward to that day. Perfect worship will be at the heart of things: let's be regular in worship here and now. There are many indications that we will have ways of serving God and each other: let us here and now in our different ways seek to be servants of each other, servants of our neighbour. There is no doubt that love will be everywhere: let us seek to show love here and now in our relationships, and to show love to all. Of course, Jesus spoke of this in our Gospel reading.

And let us remember that this world too, imperfect though it is, is God's creation, and that here and now we should appreciate it and show respect to it. We may not be leaders and powerbrokers, but let us be responsible in our own use of the earth's resources, and in the way we treat the environment.

And let us live in our bodies responsibly. In the ways that we can, let us take care of our health, so that we can also be effective in serving others and living the lives God has given us here and now.

We can't see beyond the grave. But we know one who has been there and returned. Jesus beckons and guides us towards the best future of all. Let us trust and follow Jesus here and now, and let us keep taking encouragement from the assurance that the best is yet to come. Amen.

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