

"Planting Seeds"

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John 5:19-29 • 1 Corinthians 15:35-58

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This morning we come to the end of our study of the Apostles' Creed and we are looking at what we mean when we say we believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Sometimes these are treated as two separate statements in the Creed, but as we will see, resurrection of the body and life everlasting belong together. They are describing the same thing.

A more familiar way of saying "life everlasting" is "eternal life." Our belief as Christians is that we will be with Jesus in Heaven forever. The word everlasting obviously means lasting forever. We believe that life in Christ will never run out - it will go on forever. The Bible tells us that if we put our faith in Jesus that we will live forever. We'll have eternal life.

But obviously our earthly life does come to an end at some point. As we age our bodies wear out and, like all living things, eventually they stop working all together. We learn at an early age that death is a part of life and eventually all of us face that reality ourselves. So how do we reconcile these two contradictory statements - that we will live forever and also that we will die?

I suspect that many of us would say that when we die our soul is taken to heaven to live forever and our body is buried where it "returns to dust." You could say that the soul is what will exist for all eternity, long after the body is gone. This concept is called the "immortality of the soul." Actually, this is an ancient Greek idea, dating back to Plato and Socrates. The idea was that

the soul is the true self but it is trapped inside a body. Therefore, according to the philosophers, death was a positive event because it freed the soul from the body so that it could be its true self.

But that's not a Christian notion at all, or at least it's not a complete picture of what happens to believers who die. In contrast to the idea of the immortality of the soul, Christian teaching insists that eternal life is a gift from God, not the natural state of the soul, and that "God's final purposes include the material as well as the spiritual." The Bible makes it clear that God created us as both body and soul and He called that creation good. Christianity has always opposed any heresies that devalue the human body. Our body is an important part of who we are. It's what makes us human.

Yet as we have already seen, we also know that our bodies are subject to pain, corruption and death. This is why we say we believe in the resurrection of the body. For many years I thought this statement was about the resurrection of Jesus, which we celebrated last week. But there's already a statement in the Creed about Jesus being raised from the dead. Instead, this phrase is about *you* and *me* being raised. We believe that one day our body will be made alive again.

The proof of this is Jesus' resurrection. The story of Easter is that Jesus had been beaten and whipped, his hands and feet were nailed to a cross where he died, a soldier had pierced his side with a spear, puncturing his

heart and lungs. He was buried in a tomb. But on the third day Jesus was alive again. He walked out of that tomb in a real body. Yet his body was also different. It was no longer subject to pain or corruption or death. That's what's going to happen to each one of us whose faith is in Jesus. We will participate in that same kind of resurrection when Jesus comes back.

This is what the Apostle Paul is addressing in today's Scripture reading from First Corinthians. He says, "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." On that day we will "put on immortality."

One of the things that keeps people from believing in the resurrection of the body is the question of what kind of body we will have. One of the silly questions we can ask is whether we will have to trim our fingernails in heaven. The early Christians struggled with similar questions, particularly when they began facing persecution from the Roman government. One of their questions was whether believers who were fed to the lions would be able to participate in the resurrection since their bodies had been severely damaged and had even become part of another creature's body.

These were the kind of questions Paul was answering when he wrote, "But someone will ask 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?'" To answer the question, he uses an illustration of plants and seeds.

One of my summertime favorites is ice-cold watermelon. They're sweet and juicy and the bright red and green colors are fun. I just happen to have one here today. I also have a packet of watermelon seeds. The thing is,

watermelon seeds don't look nearly as fun or delicious as the watermelon fruit. But we know that if we plant these seeds and water and care for them, they will grow vines that will bloom and then grow a watermelon. At that point we're not too concerned with what happened to the seed we planted because it has produced something far better.

In our passage this morning, Paul says that's what our resurrection will be like. He says, "What you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel" or seed. He goes on to say, "What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor (meaning it is destroyed in the process); it is raised in glory." In verse 36 he says, "What you sow does not come to life unless it dies."

I think this helps us to understand the relationship between our physical bodies now and the resurrected bodies we will have for all eternity. If you cut open a watermelon seed you won't find roots or vines or whole watermelons. Yet everything needed to create a watermelon is stored inside that seed. All of the DNA, all the chromosomes that determine the color and shape and texture are already in the seed.

It's the same for you and me. Our resurrected bodies will not be exactly like our earthly bodies. There will be no disease, no brokenness, no pain. We will be glorified. But we can also see that our current bodies, your current "self" made up of body and soul, contains the real you that will be raised again.

There are two significant implications from this. First, life in *this* body is important to God and so it must be cared for and guarded and nurtured. No human being is unimportant. You are not unimportant. Life itself is precious to God and so it

should be precious to us. That's why we work to take care of the sick and the elderly and those who are unable to care for themselves. This is why Christians have historically been opposed to euthanasia and abortion because they cause the end of human life.

What we do in our bodies really does matter to God. We are to glorify God with our bodies. That means that if we are serious about following Christ, we also must be serious about what we do with our bodies. As 1 Corinthians 6 says, "your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you." This is why sexual promiscuity and drugs and alcohol are such a problem. They damage and defile what is supposed to be God's temple, your body.

The second implication of the belief in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, however, is that we have a powerful hope in the midst of violence and death and sin. We recognize that as humans we often do terrible things to each other and to ourselves. But we cannot do any harm beyond this world. Jesus is coming back to raise us from the dead and give us our new bodies. Most importantly, he died so that we would be forgiven for the things we have done wrong in our bodies.

In our reading from John 5, Jesus says, "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." What he's saying is that in Christ, we don't have to wait until we die to begin experiencing

eternal life. It begins right now. No matter what you've done in the past, no matter what mistakes you've made, today you can experience forgiveness and join in the life everlasting.

Amen