

The Comfort of the Resurrection (Lord's Day 22 Q&A 57)

Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:35-58

"I believe ... the resurrection of the body."

The teaching of the resurrection of the body is the most mind stretching and faith demanding of all Christian doctrines.

Some people have difficulty believing in creation – the act by which God made the world out of nothing by the power of His Word.

But compared to the resurrection of the body, creation is easy to believe.

For all around us every day we see a thousand proofs of God's creation power:

the miracle of birth,
the buzzing of an insect,
the sophistication of an ear,
the glory of a sunset,
the twinkling of a million stars –
and many other things –

convince us that the universe is no mere chemical or mechanical accident.

But now think of the resurrection of the body:

so many thousands and millions of human bodies have been mangled
by accident and wars,
and billions have been buried or burned or gassed or drowned.

All have returned to the dust and the base elements from which they were formed.

But the church declares and professes, "I believe ... the resurrection of the body."

“Not only my soul
will be taken immediately after this life
to Christ its head,
but even my very flesh, raised by the power of Christ
will be reunited with my soul
and made like Christ's glorious body.” (LD 22)

In the comfort of this place, this time we can recite the line...

I believe in the resurrection of the dead.

But there are times when it is tough to say these words...

Like when we stand at an open grave.

One of those real, central - but **tough** - elements of the Christian faith.

What do we mean by that compact, loaded statement?
How important is it for our faith, for our life?

I believe in the resurrection of the body.

To put it sort of bluntly.....
.....*So what?*

"I believe in the resurrection of the body."

I believe that there will be a day in the future when I will join my dad and my grandparents to stand shoulder to shoulder with Martin Luther, John Calvin, Augustine, Moses, David, Elijah, the disciples and the list goes on.

I believe this even though it defies scientific understanding.
I believe it because the Bible tells us.

We say these words because they are a teaching of scripture.
And scripture, we believe, is the totally reliable Word of God.
Everything else may come and go...but the Word of the Lord stands forever.

On the basis of texts like the one we read tonight we take a deep breath, reach out in faith, and believe the unimaginable.
"I believe in the resurrection of the body."

Let me start by clearing out some of the rubbish around about the afterlife, some ideas that are popular in contemporary society but that have no basis in God's Word and no place in our hearts.

Three ideas I want to consider with you.

First - there are some people around, fair number of them actually, who believe that there will be reincarnation.
After this life you will get another crack at it - somewhere, as someone or something.

Your life now is probably not your first time round the track, either.
A lot of your present quirks and foibles are the results of traumas or circumstances from previous existences.

Which is why there are some Mental Health professionals around who claim to specialize in dealing with traumas of a previous lifetime.
And they have plenty of clients who put a lot of stock in their guidance.

But we had better be very clear that reincarnation is **NOT**, absolutely not what the bible means by the resurrection of the body.

Listen to what the book of Hebrews has to say: (9.27)

"...*man is destined to die once, and after that to face the judgement...*"

One life,
 one death,
 one judgement.

That's one idea

The **second** is those who believe that after death the body will crumble to dust but the soul will continue to live forever in an eternity separated from the body.

They say things like "*You will become one with the cosmic mind; your soul will attain the state of nirvana; you will become one with brahman* (meaning that you will enter an eternal zone that is not death but sort of an eternal subconscious, floating in an eternal dream world, that sort of thing).

There are also Christians who can talk this way too.

That dead is the final state for the body and the soul continues to exist.

In spite of what Scripture says.

This is the third erroneous view.

It creeps in when people talk about believers going to heaven when they die...

Sitting on a fluffy cloud, somewhere beyond the pearly gates, strumming a harp –
- you know the caricature that is often presented.

The thinking is that once we hit heaven we have made it to the end of the journey...

That we have reached our final destination.

This view is not entirely wrong

It **IS** correct to say that we are "taken immediately after this life to Christ."

WE believe that.

We just spoke those very words when we recited the Catechism a few moments ago.

We know that to be true, first of all, because of what Jesus said to the criminal on the cross.

As they hung there everyone knew that he and the two other convicts hanging there with him were about to die.

In a few hours their bodies would be pulled off the crosses and placed in graves where the process of decomposition would begin.

But Jesus turned to one of the criminals, one who has said "*I believe in you and your message,*"

Jesus turned to him and says "*today you will be with me in paradise.*" (Lk 23.43).

The point is clear...there *IS* life immediately after death.

For believers, it is life with Jesus Christ.

But what sort of life?

What sort of body?

Have you ever wondered what that body will be?

It is clear from the passage we read together from 1 Corinthians, Paul envisages a resurrection body that is positively related to the present physical body and yet is different.

But not different in the sense that it is less real

Rather it is the fulfilment, or full grown expression of what we are now...

Just as the full-grown corn is different from, and far greater to, the seed.

However difficult this is to grasp...

we must see that our resurrection is not an allegorical or spiritual one.

The Christian believes in the resurrection of the body.

The resurrection of the body is not a doctrine that can be grasped apart from the work of Christ and the power of Christ.

In the risen Christ we see a true and recognisable man complete in body and personality. Remember that he ate with his disciples (Luke 24:41-43; John 21:9-14)

And that Man, risen from the dead is even now in the presence of God the Father, Almighty.

People may laugh and mock the thought of a 'God up there' or 'heaven up there'

But there is a Man, with a resurrection body in heaven!

There was no body left in the tomb when Jesus rose from the dead.

It was a physical body...not a ghost.

Why must there be a resurrection of the body?

Isn't Christianity concerned with the soul?

When you think about it, whether in this if or in the resurrection, you need a body.

Why?

When we speak of a person and their personality and spirit...
we see that displayed in bodily expression.

Appearance, words, actions, mannerisms, capacities, influence are things that make up the person.

But none of these things are possible without expression in bodily form.
If that is true in this earthly life...how much more so in the world to come.

Think of it this way...

You might have a pen-pal or internet friend that you talk with over a long period of time.
By means of writing you might get to know each other well...but in a limited way.

But what is it you want from the person?

A picture...how they look.

We still won't really get to know them until we have met face to face.

It is the body that allows the true expression of the person.

So, for our expression to be seen in all its fullness, with no limitations...

It has to be a new, spiritual body.

And Philippians 3:21 tells us that it will be a glorious body.

I guess it's like a woman buying clothing.

They will try on many different outfits till they find the one that shows them off just right.

We need new bodies that will show us off just right.

We need new bodies, ones without limitations that will be capable of carrying and expressing all that we are and shall be in Christ, in the world to come.

How exciting is that!

Being able to express who we are, without inhibitions and limitations.

Our gospel message talks about the redeeming of the whole person...

Intellect, emotions, artistic and creative capacity, will, spirit, and body.

Salvation is of the whole personality.

What we do and experience in this life will pale in comparison to the life to come.

The new life will be greater than the life we experience now.

Too often we think of heaven as our consolation prize after we have to leave this world.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

This world is only a shadowy image of the real experience of the life to come.

That is the real life.

For Christians death is fulfilment...our arrival...our coming home.

But what is the link between our bodies here and the new glorious body?

There is a continuity and link...but how do we understand that?

If someone is buried in a grave their remains are localised...

But what about those destroyed by fire; others who choose cremation and having their ashes scattered?

Is the resurrection of the body a gathering together of these particles, reconstituting them and bringing them back to life?

There's some connection...but God gives us a new body.

Think of the illustration in 1 Corinthians 15:35ff.

The ripe full corn that grows out of the seed.

Think of the tulip with all its brilliant colour...growing from a dull bulb.

What about the butterfly with its fantastic colour and beauty...

It comes from a crawling caterpillar which withered and died as it were.

Out of that cocoon encasing death one body emerges from another in a condition that is totally different and more beautiful.

I believe in the resurrection of the body.

But what kind of body?

It's that comparison Paul makes between a seed and a plant.

The body that is sown is perishable

it is raised imperishable;

It is sown in dishonour,

it is raised in glory;

It is sown in weakness,

it is raised in power;

It is sown a natural body,

it is raised a spiritual body.

Look at Jesus. The disciples recognized him. They saw the scars in His hands. He ate with them. Yet there was a tremendous change, a difference we can hardly imagine. Space was no obstacle (Jn 24.51). Doors were no barrier (Jn 20.26).

That is how we shall be for, says the Bible, "*when he appears, we shall be like him...*" (1 Jn 3.2). Philippians 3.21 says that Jesus "*will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*"

Things that are a hindrance now to our serving God will then be removed. "*Every valley will be lifted up and every mountain and hill made low. The rough ground shall become level and the rugged places a plain.*" (Is 40.4)

How good will it be? Says the apostle Paul, "*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.*" (1 Cor 2.9)

It is paradise restored. The tree of life is present. Healing will have been brought to the nations (Rev 22.2).

Conclusion

'I believe in the resurrection of the dead'.

This is a truth we must be quite clear on.

The Bible makes it perfectly plain that if there is no resurrection then there is nothing and the whole Christian gospel collapses and is a sham (1 Cor 15:13-17)

Everything is wasted and we are left with little more than sheer animal life...

To eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. (1 Cor 15:32)

The Catechism and the Apostle's Creed have these great statements and truths about Jesus Christ.

That he lived, died, experienced hell and the third day rose again from the dead. The emphasis has been on the victory of Jesus Christ over sin, death, the grave, and hell.

This is the victory which is given to us in Christ.

And this victory should affect our every routine in the day.

We ought to remind ourselves of this first thing every morning, saying,

'Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ., (1 Cor 15:57)

If we did this more often our lives would be more marked by victory over circumstances that so often hem us in and bring us moral and spiritual defeat.

When we talk about the world to come we are not talking about our souls being absorbed into the infinite or the eternal.

I believe what Job believed,

“I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh will I see God.” (Job 19:25-26)

What a beginning...

Freed from the limitations of a poor earthly body I shall become, in Christ, all that God enabled me to be.

Then I will be able to do what I have never fully been able to do while here on earth...

I shall be able to glorify God and enjoy him forever.