

2-9-25 Sermon: “The Resurrection of the Body” – I Corinthians 15:1-12

The Apostle Paul ends his first letter to the Corinthian Christians with a long, repetitive, and somewhat convoluted explanation of the resurrection of the body. Ladd just read the first 12 verses for us. There are 46 more verses in the chapter that we will *not* be reading in worship – you’re welcome – but you can peruse it later, if you’re curious.

Because my real question is: *Why?* Why is Paul so concerned that we understand and believe the “right things” about the resurrection of the body?

Basically, Paul’s argument goes like this: Because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, we too will be raised from the dead. And furthermore, because Jesus Christ was raised *as a body*, we too will be raised as bodies. Not quite in these physical bodies, because we know they die and decay. But somehow, when Christ returns and God’s Kingdom comes, on earth as it is in heaven, we will – all of us – experience an *embodied* resurrection. Christ will put all powers and principalities under his feet. And the last enemy to be destroyed will be death.

But again...why? Why does Paul end this letter, that mostly contains instruction on how to live in Christian community, with a long theological argument about the resurrection of the body?

Well, because the Corinthian Christians were having some “body issues.”

There was this idea circulating among the Corinthian believers that, because Christ had overcome death, they, as Christians, had sort of “risen above” the body. Their bodies were physical, but *they* were spiritual. And so it didn’t matter, the Corinthians said, what they did with their bodies.

This led to several kinds of abuses in the Corinthian church. At one extreme, some Corinthians were saying, “If it doesn’t matter what we do with our bodies, we’re going to indulge every impulse!” Case in point: In First Corinthians chapter 5, Paul writes to one of the believers and tells him he really needs to cut off intimate relations with his stepmother.

At the other extreme, some Corinthians were trying to deny their bodies any pleasure, to detach and become entirely “spiritual.” In First Corinthians chapter 7, Paul writes to married couples and says, “Hey, y’all should really have sex with each other. Don’t do this whole ‘I’m-too-spiritual-for-the-body’ thing. That’s not going to end well.”

And then there’s another kind of abuse going on in the Corinthian church, one that is more mundane and perhaps also a bit more sinister. The Corinthian Christians believed that bodies didn’t matter, so they also neglected their *neighbors’* bodies. When they gathered for communion, the rich got there first and ate up all the good food and wine, leaving little for their poorer neighbors. But, they said, it doesn’t matter, the sacrament is spiritual, the food is just a symbol. Tell that to the person going home hungry.

The Corinthians wanted resurrection to be spiritual, enlightened, higher-minded than this mortal embodied existence. But Paul says no. That is not the faith I passed on to you. It is the resurrection of the body, or our faith has been in vain.

We in the twenty-first-century church have some body issues too, don’t we?

Like the Corinthian Christians, we have our own forms of hedonism and over-indulgence – a cultural fixation on sex, drugs, violence, etc. And we have our own forms of denial and restriction, of turning our bodies into liabilities and sources of shame. We think we’re too fat, or too thin, or too old, or maybe our sexuality or gender identity isn’t quite “right.” As if our own flesh-and-blood bodies were not miracles created by an ever-loving God.

But we in the present-day church also have our own issues with resurrection. Think about it: When someone dies, what do we say? We say they died and went to heaven. More specifically, we tend to talk about their soul going to heaven, to some spiritual dimension, another world where we exist forever in eternal bliss with our Creator.

And that's close...but it's *not quite* what the Christian faith proclaims. This whole idea of the immortality of the soul...that's Plato, not Jesus. Our Christian faith actually proclaims something a bit more radical, a bit more scandalous. We believe in the resurrection of the body.

Paul admits that he doesn't know *how* this works, how exactly our bodies are transformed. But he knows that it's true: when Christ comes to establish the Kingdom, the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised, incorruptible. And we shall be changed. And meet our Lord, resurrected, in our bodies.

We understand why bodily resurrection made the Corinthians uncomfortable, right? Bodies are messy and unpredictable. They break; they get sick; they die. Plato's version with the immortal soul might have been a better idea, actually; there is something *embarrassing* about a faith that proclaims a resurrection...of the *body*.

Embarrassing, maybe. But not surprising. Because we worship a God of incarnation. A word who became flesh and dwelt among us, as a human being. God, the baby in a manger.

What an absurd thing for God to do – to come to us as a body. How inefficient – how messy, how impractical – for the source of all life, love, and being to walk the earth in flesh and blood! And then, for Jesus to die, and then *rise* from the dead, as a body? What on earth was this flesh-and-blood God thinking?!

Perhaps that's the point. That bodies matter to God. Our bodies. Our neighbors' bodies. That the well-being of flesh-and-blood human beings is of utmost priority to the Word who became Flesh and dwelt among us.

Incarnation and resurrection...they go hand in hand, don't they? They are God's ultimate love song to the fragile human body. To you. And to me. And to everyone else on this earth.

We who worship an embodied God are called to live an embodied gospel.

I think that's what Paul is trying to tell the Corinthians. What' he's trying to tell us. That it matters what we do with our bodies because God loves our bodies. And it matters what happens to our neighbors' bodies, because God loves their bodies, too. *[Smile]*

That poses an interesting question, doesn't it? What does it look like to love our neighbors' bodies? What changes when we try to live the gospel of Jesus Christ...with our bodies?

Maybe it's the shift from just praying for someone going through cancer treatments...to calling them, or bringing them a meal. So they can feel our love and our prayers *in their bodies*.

I wonder if looks like taking that next step, from just *caring* about the plight of people who are homeless or food-insecure, to committing to cook a meal or volunteer at the pantry, so that hungry and homeless people can reap the benefits of our concern in their own bodies.

In our current political context, where so many groups of people are finding themselves targeted and living in fear, I wonder if an embodied gospel might look like turning off our podcast – our finishing our latest hand-wringing session – and reaching out. Making an intentional connection with someone in one of those targeted groups. Maybe someone who's an immigrant, or someone who is queer or trans. And asking them, "Hey, how are you doing? Do you feel scared? How can I help?"

Bodies matter to God. So much that God comes to us in flesh-and-blood to accompany us on life's journey. So much that God raises our bodies, so that we can feel real, human connection with our Lord and Savior.

Bodies matter to God. May they be of utmost importance to us as well. Amen.