

Sermon
November 17, 2019

Covenant Presbyterian Church
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Words for God's Church: The Transformed Body
I Corinthians 15:35-58

Paul was aware skeptics were questioning the resurrection of the body. “How does this resurrection thing work? What does this resurrection body look like?” Either the question was asked of him directly or he heard that there were people asking it of others. And it really isn’t surprising, is it? If we are honest many of us have wondered the same thing for we want to know the rest of the story. We want to know what lies ahead of us when this life is over. We can be grateful that Paul addressed this issue. And yet he acknowledges that it really is a mystery even to him. But what he does reveal opens a whole new understanding of what the transformed body will be.

Paul began with an example from nature. For there is a parallel in God’s creation. I talked about this with the children a few minutes ago. Here is a bulb. It is a seed. In its present state it looks pretty dead. But when we plant it in the ground. When we bury it under a lot of soil something amazing happens. This dead looking bulb over time transforms. What it becomes looks nothing like this - nothing like it was before. This bulb becomes a beautiful daffodil. It is one of another 750 bulbs that have been planted to go along with our other bulbs that were planted last year out on the bank on Canton Road. When they bloom in the spring they will be transformed into a bank of yellow and white and green reminding us of the children of the Holocaust. Reminding us that God brings new life out of death. And this visual will appear and reappear year after year.

This is what Paul was saying. Our bodies die and we bury them. But when we are resurrected - when new life comes we will be transformed just like a seed is transformed into a plant, or a flower. We don’t know exactly what that form will take but there are some truths revealed here.

First, we know that the transformed body is part of God’s good creation. The resurrection is the work of God the Creator and when we look at Creation we see transformation all around us. For God

has given everything the kind of body God wants it to have. Think about the different kinds of bodies we experience here on earth - humans, animals, birds, fish - each one unique and precious in God's eyes. When we see those bodies we get a hint at the diversity of the resurrected body. After all even the sun, moon and stars have their own glory. All we know now is the bodies we were given and the ways our bodies have grown and changed over the years. But just imagine how glorious our transformed resurrected bodies will be. Whatever the resurrected body looks like Paul envisions that it will be greater, grander and more glorious than anything we can imagine. It will be different than what we know now just as a seed is different from the flower that comes from it. And yet Paul says:

*What is sown is perishable,
what is raised is imperishable.*

*It is sown in dishonor,
it is raised in glory.*

*It is sown in weakness,
it is raised in power.*

The Creator God has something amazing in mind for our resurrected bodies and it will have aspects to it that far exceed what we know today. And that leads to Paul's second point.

The spiritual body - the new body we will be given - will be far superior to the physical body we have now. It will be a transformed body that embraces a new spirit. Scholars point out that the use of the words physical body and spiritual body in this passage do not really convey the correct meaning. The Greek words used are hard to translate into English. One commentator notes that the Jerusalem Bible translation may be the closest to the original language:

*“When it is sown it embodies the soul,
when it is raised it embodies the spirit.
If the soul has its own embodiment,*

so does the spirit have its own embodiment.”

He goes on to say that Paul’s point is: our mortal bodies embody the *psyche* - the soul, the animating force of our present existence, but the resurrection body will embody the divinely given *pneuma* or spirit. It is to be a “spiritual body” not in the sense that it is somehow made out of spirit and vapors, but in the sense that it is determined by the spirit and gives the spirit form a local habitation.”

(Interpretation: I Corinthians, Richard B. Hays, p. 272) The spiritual body - the transformed resurrected body - will be a body ruled by the Spirit of God living in the presence and power of God forever.

Paul declares that it is all a great mystery - even to him. For there are no clear answers to these questions about the resurrected body. Sometimes I wish those who had encountered the risen Christ had described what he looked like. Isn’t it interesting that they didn’t past the description of his hands and feet. And yet I wonder if they didn’t because it was just too wonderful to describe. You know the moment that fills your heart so deeply that words just do not suffice. But the image lives on and somehow changes your life forever.

But friends, there is one thing we do know from what they did tell us. They knew Jesus when they saw him. They recognized him. They knew his voice and his movements and that it was Jesus. And so we have the assurance that we too will know our loved ones when we are resurrected even though we will all have transformed bodies.

And so it remains a mystery. When Paul was writing he believed that Christ would return soon. And therefore some would not have died when Christ came again. Of course we know that did not happen. But his words here reflect this belief that on the Day of the Lord both the living and the dead would be transformed. He said twice - *we will all be changed* - for death has been defeated. Death is not the last word of creation. God has given us *the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*.

And because that is true Paul believed that not only do we have the promise that we will be changed on the last day but we are changed now in the present life through a relationship with Jesus

Christ. Paul believed this because it had happened to him. His life had been radically changed when he encountered the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus. His old life was gone. A new life had begun. And his life's purpose became to share the power of this new life with others. And that was his desire for God's church - the church in Corinth and for all who believed. Not only to know the promise of a transformed life in the future but to live a transformed life every day on earth. His prayer for the church was that the body of Christ would be steadfast, immovable against the skeptics, faithful, giving their best to God out of gratitude for what God had done for them through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ Jesus. He encouraged them *to always excel in the work of the Lord* because *in the Lord their labor was not in vain*.

And my friends, that is what we are called to do as well. To trust in the promise that when our life here on earth is ended and our physical bodies die that we will be transformed - resurrected - to be with God forever. And until that day comes to excel at the work God has given us here on earth.

Today during the offering we will be receiving and dedicating our pledges for 2020. Our pledges of our monetary gifts are one way we express our gratitude to God for all the gifts we have received in this life and for the promise of a transformed body in the future. And yet God desires more than just our money. God desires our hearts and our actions. And so this day as we dedicate our financial pledges I pray that we will also commit to being part of the transformation that God desires for our community of faith and for the world. May we be those who share God's love, kindness, grace and forgiveness so that all the world might be drawn to a relationship with our Lord and Savior.