

7th Sunday after Epiphany

February 20, 2022

“Raised with a new spiritual body like Christ’s!” (1 Corinthians 15:42-45)

By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today’s text for this 7th Sunday after Epiphany is from the Epistle reading for today, 1 Corinthians 15:42-45

“So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. 45 And so it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.”

Here ends our text.

If there was an 8th Sunday after Epiphany we would be finishing up the rest of the chapter next Sunday. But since there isn’t, and next Sunday is the Sunday of the Transfiguration of our Lord, we will get to hear the whole triumphant declaration of everything that Paul is building towards about the resurrection from the dead. Paul is laying out for us the order, the most glorious order, of a Christian’s eternal future – your eternal future and what it’s going to be like.

You know, in order for you to be here right now this morning in church, there was an order of things that you did first. It’s your routine that you follow. It may vary a little, but in order for you to not be sitting here in your pajamas and slippers with uncombed hair and unshaven faces, things had to happen first. You made sure your stomachs aren’t growling, maybe had a cup of something with some caffeine in it to wake you up, made sure the car was gassed up, put on your Sunday shorts, grabbed your offering envelope and found your favorite spot in the church.

And it would be safe to say that the rest of your day has an order to it also. As a follower of Jesus, Paul gives you a concluding thought in this chapter 15 of first Corinthians to help you order your day.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:58)

“Always abounding in the work of the Lord”, Paul says. He doesn’t say “church work”, although that is included. But, the work of the Lord continues when you leave the church, doesn’t it. All that you do in service to the Lord is not in vain. All your labor “in the Lord” has eternal consequences because it is the Lord’s work who makes it profitable. And the reason why it is so important to be steadfast and immovable in your faith and love for the Lord?

Well, that’s the whole subject of chapter 15 isn’t it. Paul gives the reason why he can conclude the whole chapter with a big “Therefore”. And the reason is... well let me read to you the preceding verse.

“The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:57)

We see there is an order of things that take place. First there is death and then there is a resurrection from the dead. There is an eternal victory given to all believers, yes it is a gift, because of the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Some of the Corinthians were saying that there is no resurrection from the dead. The order of things stops at death. It’s like you don’t make it to church because the battery of your car is dead or you have a flat tire. You’re stuck where you’re at, rowing without a paddle and getting nowhere.

But, Paul is telling us this morning that there is a somewhere after death. And that somewhere after death, heaven itself is only possible because of what Christ did to death. He made it a “nowhere”.

Listen to the verse that we so often hear on Easter. It’s a verse that’s the strength of our daily living and not just on Easter.

“O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”

And the answer? NOWHERE! Nowhere to be found! Death once had a poisonous sting, and that sting had its potent, eternally condemning power, the law! But, no more! Death is but a sleep for the believer in Christ.

If there were no law, then there would be no sin and consequently no death. But, there is God's law which all of us have miserably failed at. There was no way for us to get around the law. **And as Paul vividly describes, our natural body is sinful, corrupt, dishonorable, and weak. That's the way it is sown in the grave.**

The body that is sown in the grave is helpless to raise itself. It's inert and completely incapable of coming back to life. Death was not the natural order of things. But when sin entered by the first Adam, death interjected itself and dishonored the body so that it is quickly buried and no longer in our sight.

And if this was the end, as some Corinthians were believing, then what a miserable, hopeless lot we are. But death is not the end of a believer's life. Death is no longer a sting. Yes, it is a most sad moment of separation. But, God tells us that there is still more to come. The best is yet to come!

For what was sown in corruption is raised incorruptible! What was sown in dishonor is raised in glory! What was sown in weakness is raised in power! And what was sown as a natural body, that had fallen to sin, is raised a spiritual body. And this spiritual body is no longer subject to temptation or sin. It can no longer fall. It no longer feels pain, hunger, or sadness. It can no longer die. For the spiritual body is a glorified body! It has received and only has the life-giving spirit of the Last Adam!

And who is the Last Adam? It is He who conquered death Himself by His death on the cross and took away the sting of the law by fulfilling it perfectly for us. Jesus Christ is He! He has put all things under His feet, including death! He rose again three days after His death to show His victory! He is the first fruits! His body was buried...inert, but not helpless. Listen to what Jesus said about His own death and resurrection in John 10:17-18.

“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. 18 No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”

And that is the beautiful order of the Gospel message. Jesus laid down His life and raised it again. The whole Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, raised Christ's body from the dead so that He would then raise the sleeping bodies of all who believe in Him.

That's the order, as Paul tells us in verses 22-23.

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.”

Yes, thanks be to God there is an afterward at Jesus coming!

“thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Yes, we're all going to get a shiny new model of a body, with all the bells and whistles, when Christ returns.

1 John 3:2 “ Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

Now, we are children of God. Now, death has lost its sting. Now, we are waiting for the big reveal. For God promises us that our bodies that are sown in the earth will be raised to be like Jesus our Savior!

Only Christ can do this as Paul tells us in Philippians 3:21.

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

And so, it bears repeating one more time, that our lives now have a most beautiful purpose and glorious order through Jesus. So, we can say “therefore” again.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)