

Sermon Series: "I Believe in..."

Sermon Title: "The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting"

Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 23; John 11:17-27; I Corinthians 15:35-38, 40, 42-44, 49, 51-55

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Today we finish our sermon series on the Apostles' Creed with the final statement of belief. "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." The creed ends where Easter begins with Christ overcoming our human death and becoming the first resurrected body.

Ben Franklin wrote, "In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." Some might escape paying taxes, but none of us will escape our physiological death. Our mortality is a given. No matter if we live a few hours or one hundred + years, there will come a time for each of us, when we will take our last breath and our hearts will stop beating. We will all die! What a cheery note for a sermon!!! However, almost every culture and religion throughout history has some sort of belief in an afterlife, a life after this life. These beliefs are not the same, but these beliefs hold that something happens after we breath our last, that dying is not the end of us.

As Christians we, too, believe that something happens after we die. We believe that "on the third day he (Jesus) rose from the dead" to show us that there is life after this life. All four Gospels conclude with the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus. The four Gospels do not all tell the same life events, or stories of Jesus, but all four do tell of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus. Each Gospel tells the Resurrection story differently and each has different resurrection appearances of Jesus, but for each the resurrection of Jesus is the climax of the Gospels. The only evidence we have of a bodily resurrection is the resurrection of Jesus. When Jesus brought Lazarus back to life, his was not a resurrected body, but a resuscitated one. A resurrected body does not experience death again. Lazarus eventually died again. What do the Gospels tell us about the resurrected body of Jesus? They tell that sometimes Jesus was not recognized. When Mary went to the tomb that Sunday morning, she thought Jesus was the gardener. When two followers were returning home to Emmaus, they didn't recognize the stranger that was walking with them until Jesus broke the bread. The Gospels also tell us that Jesus' resurrected body could suddenly appear in a locked room, yet his wounds from the Crucifixion were still present and could be touched. Also, with his resurrected body, Jesus could eat. In I Corinthians, Paul tells us that Jesus appeared to over 500 people (I Corinthians 15:6). Paul also wrote that Jesus appeared to him after he ascended into heaven. Jesus' resurrected body is similar to his earthly body in some ways and different in others.

No one knows what our resurrected bodies will be like. Resurrected bodies are not decaying zombie type bodies. When we die, our bodies decay and return to dust, unless we are cremated. Then our cremains are just dust! The scriptures promise that when we die, we will receive new heavenly bodies. But we don't know if they will be similar to Jesus' resurrected body or different. We don't know because no one has come back to tell us yet, except Jesus. There are those who have had near death experiences and claim to have talked with Jesus or seen Jesus. They have shared that as one begins to die one is drawn to the light. One receives sense of peace, pure love, and freedom. Most who have had these near death experiences report that they do not want to return. But none report that they received a resurrected body, maybe because they didn't fully die before returning to this earthly life. Paul wrote that we have earthly bodies and heavenly bodies. They each have their own glory, their own beauty. They are each special in a different way. This is what I am hoping for with a new resurrected body. I'm hoping that we don't have issues with gaining weight. Jesus often used the image of wedding banquets as heaven in his parables. Earthly wedding banquets are filled with the joy of two people finding each other and committing their lives to each other. At wedding banquets there is always plenty of food, lots of dancing, and pure fun. So, if we can eat with

our resurrected bodies, I am hoping we can eat all we want at the banquet and not gain one pound! And I hope we can dance all we want and never get tired!

No one can actually prove there is life after this life, an everlasting life with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All we can do is believe. Anglican Bishop N. T. Wright wrote in his book, *Surprised by Hope*, “Belief in the bodily resurrection includes the belief that what is done in the present in the body by the power of the Spirit, will be reaffirmed in the eventual future in ways at which we can presently only guess.” Guessing is all we have when it comes to what our resurrected bodies and life everlasting will be like.

Coming to terms with our mortality can be frightening. I remember when I received a cancer diagnosis. I wasn't ready to look death in the face. I had too much to do, too much of life to live. I didn't want to die, yet. I still don't want to die, just yet. I still see a future in my life. But I am ready whenever it is my time. I put my whole trust and faith that Jesus' resurrection is God saying to death, “You have no power over my people. I am greater than you. I have created life for these people and I will continue to create life for these people after their breathing stops.” On Ash Wednesday we are reminded that we come from dust and from dust we will return as we receive ashes on our heads with the sign of the cross. I find this phrase daunting as well as hopeful. God created us out of dust and God can create a new resurrected body from the dust of our decaying bodies or our dusty cremains. Adam Hamilton addressed the anxiety we have facing our mortality. He wrote in his book, *Creed*, “By conquering death, Jesus addressed our fear and uncertainty and offered his first disciples, and us, a peace that sustains us even in the face of great tragedy and pain.” These lines from Psalm 23 do also, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For thou aren't with me.” “And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” The Resurrection of Jesus reinforces these lines from Psalm 23. The Resurrection of Jesus shows us that death is not our end, but a new beginning. The Resurrection of Jesus and this new beginning offers us the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. This belief is foundational to our Christian faith. No other faith tradition has a divine, human being who died, who rose again, and who promises to return.

Even with this faith, when a loved one dies, the loss and the grief can be unbearable and crippling. On one hand we cling to the hope that our loved one is receiving a new resurrected body that has no more pain. On the other hand, we hurt deeply. We cry until there are no more tears, yet we cling to our faith. Our faith can change our view of death, how we grieve, and how we face life. When we believe God has overcome death, we have hope that our loved ones are receiving God's peace and joy, and God's abounding, everlasting mercy and love. We have hope that God has swallowed up death. And we have hope that we one day, too, will receive this everlasting life. We trust that “through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light, Take my hand, Precious Lord, lead me home.” (From “Precious Lord, Take My Hand,” by Thomas Dorsey.)

When Jesus said, “I am the Resurrection and I am Life,” he wasn't just trying to comfort Martha, but he was claiming his power over death. I believe that Jesus has the power to overcome our earthly death, to resurrect us and to give us everlasting life. As Jesus counts on me to serve him faithfully in this life, I am counting on Jesus to not only to lead me, empower me, and give me the grace that I need in this life, but I am also counting on Jesus that when I draw my last breath, death does not have the final word. I believe because Jesus lives, I, too, shall live eternally with him.

This concludes the sermon series on The Apostles' Creed. We have looked at who God is and why we believe in God. We have looked at who Jesus is and why we believe in Jesus. We have looked at who the Holy Spirit is and why we believe in the Holy Spirit. We have looked at the importance of the church and the communion of saints and why we believe in them. We have looked at the importance of the forgiveness of sins and why we believe in it. And we looked at the importance of and why we believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

Resources: *Creed: What Christians Believe and Why* by Adam Hamilton; *Surprised by Hope* by N. T. Wright

