

**“Creed: I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body
And the Life Everlasting”**

Date: August 12, 2018

Place: Lakewood UMC

Occasion: Creed, series

Theme: Resurrection, eternal life

Texts: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19; John 14:1-4

We come now to the final lines of the Apostles’ Creed: “I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” Human beings have wondered about what happens to us when we die since, probably as far back as there have been human beings.

Nearly every ancient culture had some ritual for marking death, and most held a hope that human existence did not end with death. Consider the Egyptians and the ancient pyramids of the pharaohs. Death is the one shared experience of all human beings.

Every one of us will bury people will love. We will wrestle with our own mortality. And, like all people who have gone before us, we will wonder and perhaps hope that there is something beyond this life.

Christians believe that in Jesus’ death and resurrection, God gave a definitive answer to the existential questions of death and life beyond death. Clearly Jesus was crucified, dead and buried. His friends grieved his death. But those same friends claimed that on Sunday morning, after his death on Friday, Jesus stepped out of the tomb.

These same men and women claimed that they had seen him, eaten with him, touched him and been taught by him for 40 days after his death. The tomb in which Jesus had been buried was empty; people could go and see it.

Jesus’ disciples, who had been so afraid for their own lives after his death, boldly stepped into the streets to proclaim that he had risen. In the years following, people such as Paul, who had initially rejected Christianity

and had even persecuted Christians, claimed to have had encounters, visions and profound experiences with the risen Christ. Once again, in the late 50's, Paul writes of Jesus that "he appeared to more than 500 brothers and sisters at once – most of them still alive to this day." (1 Cor. 15:6)

So, with this confidence, Paul could affirm that for him there was no question that we survive death, and he could write, quoting Isaiah 25:8, "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

We believe in life beyond death because Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples bore witness to it, and those who came later had profound experiences with the risen Christ. Jesus' death and resurrection were, in part, God's way of speaking to the deepest and most fundamental human crisis: death. But, because of Christ's resurrection, we need not fear death.

I love that phrase in Scripture, included in the Creed: "On the third day he rose again." As important as Jesus' death is for Christians, it was his resurrection that demonstrated his triumph over evil, hate, sin and death. As Jesus said to John "Because I live, you will live too." (John 14:19)

So, Christians trust that our lives continue beyond death. We believe that Christ will return for us at our death, and most Christians take seriously the idea that one day Christ will bring an end to the world as we know it. But the question many want answered is, "what is heaven like?"

Paul reminds us, "God has prepared things for those who love him that no eye has seen, or ear heard, or that haven't crossed the mind of any human being." (1 Cor. 2:9) So, since Heaven can't be imagined or described, the biblical authors had to resort to analogies based on human experience.

In the book of Revelation the streets of Heaven are described as being paved with gold. That's a poetic way of saying, heaven is going to be absolutely beautiful. Jesus used the image of a wedding to describe Heaven. For most people, their wedding day is the happiest day of their lives. When Jesus compared heaven to a wedding reception, I believe that is what he meant.

Beyond these word-pictures, we don't have a great deal of detail about Heaven. In Revelation 21 we are told "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain." I believe that. I believe that when we are given our resurrected bodies, the old rules of earth will no longer apply. All of our sickness and suffering will be healed and done away with.

But what will a resurrected body look like? We affirm in the Creed, "I believe in the resurrection of the body." Does that mean that *this* body we have now will be resurrected? How will that be possible, when after hundreds of years our bodies decay? Or what will happen to the bodies of those who are burned to death, or whose bodies are destroyed by a bomb? Does it mean they can't be resurrected?

And at what age will our bodies be resurrected? At the age when we die, or when we're in our 20's or 30's? I'd never be able to recognize my grandparents because I never saw them in their 20's.

When we read about Jesus' resurrection, we learn that his body had changed. Mary Magdalene, the first to see him, did not recognize him and thought he was the gardener. The two disciples walking to Emmaus thought he was a stranger. When his disciples gathered around him just before he ascended to heaven, some of them did not recognize him.

Yes, he had the ability to eat, and there were scars from his crucifixion on his hands and side. He had flesh they could touch. But he

also walked through walls. These appearances by Jesus may give us pieces of the puzzle regarding what our life in heaven will be like.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 that the body which is put into the ground is not like the body which is raised, much like the seed that is planted in the ground is not like the plant or tree which grows from it.

The bodies of most Christians throughout history have been completely absorbed back into the earth. But God does not require what is rotting in the ground to give us a new body. Somehow, God is able to create a new, spiritual body.

And somehow, our spiritual body is connected to the fleshly body. The resurrection of the body, in other words, is not like a bad zombie movie. God creates a new, heavenly body which is not exactly like this earthly body, but which I believe we will be able to recognize each other.

What I love about this idea of the resurrection of the body is that we will not be disembodied spirits after we die, but instead we will have a glorious body that is not subject to disease or decay; no more aches and pains.

And if Jesus' appearances following his resurrection are any guide, we'll be able to touch, feel, eat, drink, see and be. Yet, our body will be different from anything we've experienced this side of eternity – a glorious body by which those who have known us in the past will know us in heaven.

Christians have often used the caterpillar and the butterfly as a picture to describe the connection between this earthly body and the heavenly body.

Christ's resurrection, and his promise that we will be raised, is God's answer to the questions every human asks about death and the afterlife.

Adam Hamilton says, “I end every funeral I preach in the same way that I end every Easter sermon. Here’s what I say:

“People ask me from time to time if I really believe that Jesus rose from the dead and has gone to prepare a place for us. Do I really believe that death doesn’t have the final word, and that because Jesus lives we will also? And my answer is always the same – “I not only believe it. I’m counting on it.”

My friends, we’ve come to the end of our sermon series on the Apostles’ Creed. I hope that it has been helpful to you. But more than merely providing you information about what we as Christians believe, I hope you have been inspired.

I hope you have been inspired to not only nod your head in agreement and say, “Yeah, I guess I believe that too.” I hope you have been inspired to live your faith more boldly. I hope you have been strengthened to know what you believe and why, and why it matters.

And I hope that if you were sitting on the fence, that perhaps this sermon series has inspired you to make a profession of faith, and to say, “Yes, I do believe this. And I want to commit my life to following this man Jesus.”

As a way of responding to the Word today, I invite us all to stand and say the Apostle’s Creed. I pray that you will say it with new meaning and understanding. I pray that you will commit your life to it. For these are not merely words we repeat, these are the foundational beliefs of our faith.

Amen? Amen. Please join with me in saying the Apostles’ Creed:

This sermon borrows heavily from the book *Creed: What Christians Believe and Why*, by Adam Hamilton, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016, pp. 145-168.