

Raised in Glory

February 20, 2022

1st Corinthians 15: 35-38 and 42-50

³⁵ But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” ³⁶ Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

⁴² So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. 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 physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual.

⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. ⁵⁰ What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

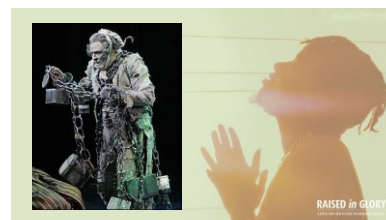


Last week, as we talked about the both/and of resurrection, part of the challenge I gave to each of us was to seek a way to grow in our discipleship. Maybe work the GPS questions a

bit during the week. Maybe read and ponder the lectionary readings. Maybe read a blog or devotional about those readings. Maybe something else bubbled up in you – extra time in prayer, reading that faith book you bought but never started. However it was that you sought to give a little more time to God this past week, did anyone experience a feeling of growth or a deepening of your relationship?

Today we turn to the latter part of 1st Corinthians 15, where Paul continues to lean into the idea of resurrection. This week's passage begins with a framing question: *"How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"* Paul is wondering what we will look like on the other side of the resurrection. Paul also encourages us to consider how we move from physical to spiritual beings. Along that line of thinking, that we are works in progress, we will also continue to look at how we journey towards that day when we stand before our creator. Here again, spiritual disciplines come into play. As we prepare to delve into the word of God, let us begin with a word of prayer...

There were some in the church in Corinth who struggled with resurrection. They were, in reality, repulsed by the concept of resurrecting these mortal and imperfect bodies. In essence they questioned why one would ever want to reinhabit this shell that we cast off when we die. Why would anyone want to return to a body riddled with cancer or covered in leprosy? Why would anyone want to reinhabit a body that had worn out over many years of life? I can understand their concerns, their hesitation to venture down this line of thought. As I thought about these concerns and others that I have heard over the years concerning what happens when we die, an image of Jacob Marley from the book Scrooge popped into my mind.



Paul is admittedly wrestling with something that he does not fully understand. 2,000 years later we do not know much more than Paul knew - and our knowledge is pretty limited. There is so much that we do not know about what we will become. But, my friends, that is true about our faith in other areas. We can, for example, describe God in some ways. But our description will always fall far short of the reality that we will one day come to know. Mystery is ever a part of our faith.

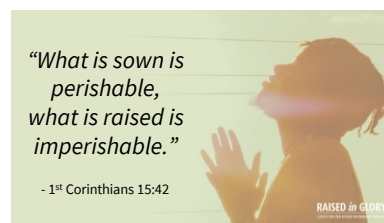


In addressing their concerns about how we will be raised in glory, Paul does have some thoughts. Turn with me to chapter 15, verse 36, as we look at Paul's thoughts about the

resurrection of the dead. Paul begins with a practical foundation. He reminds those who have lived all their lives in an agricultural society that what comes out of the ground is not the same thing that goes in. The seed must die for new life to come. That *"bare seed"* is sown. In verse 38 we read, *"God gives it a body as God has chosen"* and that new body comes up as wheat or some other grain or as a tomato or whatever. Paul's point here is that God is at work in the process. It is God that brings new life. It is God that brings transformation, that changes the seed or us into something new.

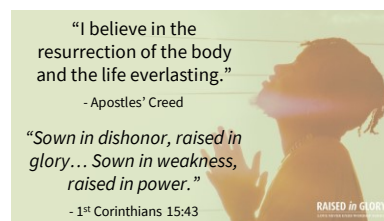
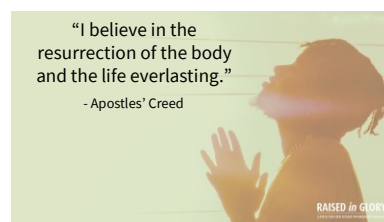
Connecting into the resurrection of the dead, Paul writes, *"What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable."*

When we are born, our physical bodies are perishable, finite, limited. In this life we are like the seed that goes into the ground. If new life is to come, it cannot remain the seed. In the same way, if we are to be raised to new life, we cannot remain what we were. Because resurrection is God's work, it is not a natural occurrence. We need to have eyes of faith to see and understand what takes place.



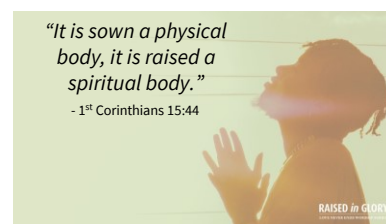
The body that we are now inhabiting is perishable. Paul argues that we, like a seed, will be changed, that we will be different from what we are now. Paul claims that there is a new creation that emerges at the point of death and new life, just as that plant is not what the seed was. Now there is a connection, though. A tomato seed, for example, does not produce bean plants. A geranium seed does not produce grapes.

A few weeks ago, we shared the Apostles' Creed. From that ancient creed we spoke these words: "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." These words go hand in hand, and they straddle the line between this world that we know and the world that we are longing for. These words speak of a life that is bigger than our physical death. They also hint about a transformation that is at work in all of us. In verses 43 and 44 Paul also speaks of this transformation, of this moment when we are changed and made new. In verse 43 Paul speaks of how we are *"Sown in dishonor, raised in glory... Sown in weakness, raised in power."* In the here and now, in this body, we live in dishonor, in sin, and in

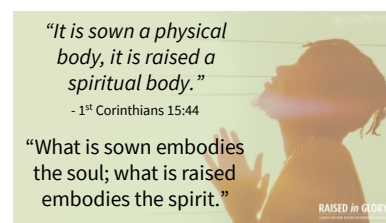


weakness. When we are raised to new life we will be raised in glory and in power. As we touched on last week, being raised to new life is not just at the moment of death. Once we accept and claim the resurrection that a relationship lived in Jesus brings, then we begin to experience his glory and power here on earth, here in our lives, now! The seeds of that final transformation are at work in us from the moment we claim the salvation that Christ offers. Through the claiming of the promise of salvation and through the power of Christ's resurrection we begin the process of being made new over and over, more and more into the image of Christ himself.

Paul also gives us some insight into our final transformation, into that moment when we fully realize what it means to be raised in glory and power. In verse 44 Paul puts it this way: *“It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.”* Here again Paul hints at transformation or at this change to come. This is what Paul is getting at in verses 47-49. Adam, the first man, was of the dust. Jesus, the new Adam, was of heaven. Paul reminds us that while we bear the image of the dust, the flesh, we also bear the image of the man of heaven, Jesus Christ.



It is only when we dig a little deeper into the original Greek that we begin to really understand what Paul is saying here. Today we use the words ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ almost interchangeably. A more accurate translation in terms of the original Greek would be this: “What is sown embodies the soul; what is raised embodies the spirit.” *Psuche* is the Greek word for ‘soul’. It would have been understood to mean our ‘creatureliness’ or as the life force within us that makes us human. *Pnuema* is the Greek word for ‘spirit’, and it was understood as the divine spark within us, as the image of God in which all humans are created, as the treasure that lives in these earthen vessels that we call flesh.



With this understanding we can see how in this life we are embodied souls. As such we are subject to the needs of the flesh – food, water, shelter, and so on. As embodied souls we are also subject to the passions of the flesh – pride, lust, power, greed. Because of all that pulls at us and draws us away from God, we are but dim reflections of the Christ that dwells in each of our spirits.

When we are yet in the flesh, we are but imperfect examples of what a life lived in the spirit could truly be. Once resurrected, we become embodied spirits, able to reflect the full power and glory of God. That will be a most wonderful day, won't it? Even though we do not fully understand what eternity will be like, our faith tells us that there will be great joy as we stand in the presence of God. Yet we experience joy in this life too. Because we have the spark of the divine within us, in another way we are like the seed that is planted in the ground. Once we accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the Spirit begins to work within us, shaping and forming us into who God created us to be.

This process is not one where we begin at ground zero, where we become something totally different than we were. You might recall that earlier I stated that a tomato seed cannot produce a bean plant. We are each created in the image of God, born with the divine spark in us. God is part of the DNA within us from the very beginning of our lives. The soul that we are born with is like the seed that goes into the ground, the seed that must die for new life to be born. In the spiritual sense, the human part of us, the fleshy part of us, is something that we must deny lest we fall to sin. It is something that, at times, we must die to in order to grow in our faith.

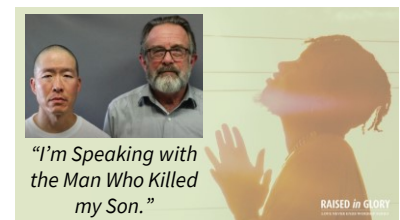
In the same way that a tomato seed produces tomato plants, we too are created to live as image bearers of the divine. When we accept Jesus, we are beginning a new journey, yes! But we are not becoming something totally different. We are becoming a new creation, growing into who and what God planned us to be all along. In this sense, the spirit within us leads us and convicts us, guide us and refines us, helping us to grow into the new creation that God designed us to be.



Part of our calling is always helping others to see faith and to experience the light and love of Christ, to see how they too might one day be raised in glory. As we move into the gospel reading for today, I invite you to turn to Luke 6, verses 27-38. Read along with me as I read verses 27-31.

²⁷ “But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

In this teaching Jesus is asking his followers to go above and beyond what the rest of the world does – to love those hard to love, to give to those hard to give to. Jesus even gives us the Biblical version of the Golden Rule: *“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”* To illustrate what this looks and feels like in real life, to help us understand what it means to live and love in this way in our day to day lives, please listen to this skit, which is a transcript of an actual conversation that took place in a prison. It is the story of how we begin to learn to love our enemies. The original podcast title: “I’m Speaking with the Man Who Killed my Son”. The conversation took place 25 years after a tragic fatal shooting that happened on campus at a college in Massachusetts. Shortly after his son’s death, Greg Gibson began the process of writing a book about it. The purpose of the book was “to understand how it happened, in the hopes of preventing anyone else from having to live through what he has.”



After the book was published, Greg started receiving letters from the man who killed his son. Those letters led to Greg's desire to meet with Wayne. According to Greg, "I wasn't looking to forgive him or to find closure, but just to look Lo in the eye and talk." It was the first time they had ever spoken. Here is their conversation.

TOM/Greg Gibson: *My name is Greg Gibson. And I'm speaking with the man who killed my son.*

JOHN/Wayne Lo: *My name is Wayne Lo. I'm sitting here with the father of Galen, whom I murdered 25 years ago.*

TOM/Greg Gibson: *How would you describe your mental state in those days?*

JOHN/Wayne Lo: *I was disturbed. I would see things that made me think that I was on some kind of a mission from God. But I know I wasn't, now that I look back at –*

TOM/Greg Gibson: *Sure, but at the time that was what you felt.*

JOHN/Wayne Lo: *At the time, that was.*

TOM/Greg Gibson: *Yeah.*

JOHN/Wayne Lo: *At the time, I felt it. So, I felt I had to do something. I was able to just take a taxi and go to the gun store. I said I want this SKS rifle. And it's incredible how easy it was.*

TOM/Greg Gibson: *And the same, I assume, with the ammunition.*

JOHN/Wayne Lo: *I had my mom's credit card. The people on the phone where I ordered from, they said, "Thank you very much for your purchase. We'll get it out as soon as we could to you." This was the first time ever purchasing a weapon, ever using a weapon, ever firing a weapon...*

TOM/Greg Gibson: *Wow.*

JOHN/Wayne Lo: *For just a few minutes, I destroyed so many lives.*

TOM/Greg Gibson: For years you were in denial about the whole episode. And then at some point, you reached out to me. You said you wanted to apologize. What changed?

JOHN/Wayne Lo: Someone came to me one day with a magazine here in prison. And he said, uh, "Wayne, you might wanna read this." And in the middle of it was an article where you had an interview. And it made me realize that there are families out there.

TOM/Greg Gibson: Yeah.

JOHN/Wayne Lo: I didn't know Galen personally at Simon's Rock, but at the trial, you spoke about how you guys came on campus that time and came out of the car, and everybody gave Galen a standing ovation. I was there. I was there, Mr. Gibson, I was there. I didn't know him, but I stood up, too... because I knew everybody loved him.

TOM/Greg Gibson: Well, we sure did. This is really exhausting, isn't it?

JOHN/Wayne Lo: Yes, it is.

TOM/Greg Gibson: You tell your parents that you're having this conversation?

JOHN/Wayne Lo: Yes. Absolutely. I know they thank you just as much as I thank you for allowing me to, to even apologize to you. There are other families that don't want to have anything to do with me and I totally understand that.

TOM/Greg Gibson: Yeah, I do too. You know, we've all suffered, we've all grown wise from our suffering, and some people do it one way, some people do it another way. I understand that.

JOHN/Wayne Lo: I know that your family... perhaps they don't agree with what you're doing - giving me the opportunity to speak. Is there ever a conflict within you that you're doing something that might bother them?

TOM/Greg Gibson: Yeah, I think it bothers my son. He just doesn't want to have anything to do with it. He doesn't want to talk about it. And I respect that completely. So yeah, I think they think I'm a little crazy. But they're proud that I'm working for Galen so that

people don't have to keep doing this. I don't think any of them would like to be here, with me, talking to you, no. And that's just the way, you know, that's the way it is.

As these two men sat and talked, a relationship began to form. Since then, reflecting on his experience, Greg Gibson said, *"The idea of forgiveness is a greater mystery still — one I'll spend the rest of my life attempting to unravel. As it happens, I've got a helper in this endeavor, a strange sort of sidekick. His name is Wayne Lo and he's the man who murdered my son... If I've learned anything since Galen's death, it is simply to follow my heart, regardless of the expectations that surround me."* The story is ultimately one of learning from tragedy, of gaining understanding in an attempt to prevent others from walking a similar path. A sincere apology has been given; deep remorse has been expressed. A conversation has begun. Forgiveness is still a work in progress. Two unlikely partners have come together to be a voice raised in unison against violence.



We all have voices. And we all have *voice* – perspective, experience, a story. What matters is what we do with our voices: speaking out, praying, blessing others – according to

Jesus, especially our enemies and those who we do not see eye to eye with or are different from. As in this story, in all of our lives the work of reconciliation is ongoing, it is never ending. It is messy and complicated, not usually linear. It is hard. We are called together to hear one another's stories, to connect to God and to one another. We hear the voice of God in each other's stories, in our conversations, in our shared experiences. Here we find a powerful love – one that allows us to love even our enemies.

In Luke 6, verses 36-38, Jesus says, *“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”* When we are willing to offer mercy and forgiveness, when we choose not to judge or condemn, we are living in love. When we choose to love well, then this *“good measure... running over, will be put into our laps”*. Love leads to love. Mercy leads to mercy. Forgiveness leads to forgiveness. What we give will be given back to us.

Once in heaven, we will live in God’s love. Everyone there will know God’s love. But here, at this time, on this earth, not everyone knows God’s love. But because we have the power of the Spirit in us – *pneuma*, that part of God, that spark of the divine within – we have the power to share God’s love with others, especially the least and the lost. My friends, may we live making real the love of God that transforms lives and that one day can raise them to glory. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. Over the course of your journey of faith, how have you experienced God’s hand at work, bringing you new life?
- 2) *Pray*. Where in your life or faith do you need to experience God’s hand at work, bringing healing or wholeness or restoration? Bring it to God in prayer!
- 3) *Study*. Re-read Luke 6:27-38. How does practicing the walk of faith laid out by Jesus in verses 27-38a empower or lead you to experience verse 38b?