“Definitely Not Zombies”

1 Corinthians 15

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May 8, 2016

As we wrap up the Easter season, it seems quite appropriate to read this passage from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians.

Where he talks about the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of all people.

This is his elaboration of the Easter story.

This was a topic that those Corinthians struggled to understand.

They were having a hard time grasping the notion.

Which had Paul worried.

For Paul, the resurrection is the heart of the Gospel.

He declares that the whole Good News of Jesus Christ is wrapped up in the resurrection.

But those Corinthian Christians were having a difficult time making sense of it.

They were on board with the resurrection of Jesus.

Though they weren’t there to witness it,

they trusted voices like Paul and others who saw the resurrected Lord in person.

Paul reminds them of all of those people in the first part of the chapter.

He mentions the disciples and the apostles as well as himself.

All of these people can confirm the event.

The Corinthian’s heard their testimony and believed it to be true.

That Jesus was in fact resurrected from the dead.

It is after all, not the most outrageous of things to believe about Jesus. He healed others of incurable diseases.

Turned water into wine.

Is somehow both fully human and fully God at the same time.

It seems only fitting to believe that God would resurrect Jesus from the dead.

And the Corinthians were ok with that part.

It seems, however, that the Corinthian’s bigger struggle was with the resurrection of the dead.

That is, the resurrection of all of us. All of humanity.

They struggled with understanding what happens to us when we die.

I would venture to say this is a common struggle, we’ve all had from time to time.

A friend of mine tried to explain the resurrection to her children when they were younger.

She said the conversation would always come up around Easter.

They would hear the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection and ask her about it.

She would tell them the Easter story and they would get confused when no bunnies or Easter eggs were part of her explanation.

So she’d turn to nature and try to explain it like a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly,

or like a person being revived with CPR.

Her children would look at her with blank faces, not understanding.

The trouble is, any analogy we use for resurrection falls short.

It isn’t like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. That’s transformation.

It isn’t like a person being brought back to life with CPR.

That’s resuscitation.

Nothing we experience in this world is exactly like what happens in the resurrection.

In our world, things die and stay dead.

They don’t come back to life.

My friend’s son got to thinking about all of this, trying to understand what it was like when Jesus came back on Easter morning.

He suggested that maybe being resurrected is like becoming a ghost, where your soul is alive again but your body stays dead.

His mother said “Well, maybe. But when Jesus came back, his body did too. Remember, his body was gone from the tomb. And when he appeared to the disciples, they were able to touch him. So he wasn’t a ghost.”

“Okay,” the son said. “What about zombies? Maybe his body came back but his soul went on to heaven?”

My friend said she couldn’t help but laugh at his response, admiring his imagination.

“Well,” she said, “that’s also a good thought, but when he came back to the disciples, he spoke to them and Luke tells us he shared a meal with them. I don’t think a zombie would be capable of that!”

“Okay” the son replied, “so not zombies?”

“Definitely not zombies,” his mother replied.

I love this story, told by my friend.

It gets to heart of our curiosity around death and resurrection.

It points to the struggle we have to understand what happens to us when we die.

Later this morning we will say the Apostles’ Creed together.

There is a line where we state we believe in the resurrection of the dead.

This is one of those lines in that creed that we might not fully understand.

How often do we stop to think about being resurrected from the dead?

It certainly doesn’t come up often in our conversations here at the church.

But as we read here in 1 Corinthians, it was a big conversation topic in the early church.

It was a pivotal bit of theology the church was wrestling with.

And Paul insists that it is the central element of the Gospel.

Like the Corinthians, we might be okay with Christ’s resurrection.

He did a lot of other amazing things, so why not be raised from the dead, body and all?

We probably don’t think twice about the banner that hangs here in the sanctuary.

Showing Jesus resurrected, with the wounds from the cross still intact.

We trust that he did not become a ghost without a body, not a zombie without soul.

We trust that the resurrected Christ is both body and soul.

Together, raised to new life.

But what about us?

Do we really trust that the same will happen for us?

Do we really believe that our bodies will be resurrected with our souls?

This aspect of resurrection is bit harder to grasp.

If you’re like me, you might get to wondering about cremation or decomposition.

How can God put our bodies back together again when they’ve been reduced to ash and dust?

This is such a strange thing to think about, and a bit morbid.

I admit, I don’t fully understand how this works.

But I also don’t fully understand how a seed and an egg can create a human.

I don’t really understand how those cells will divide over and over again until that baby is formed.

And that the baby is born with emotions and a personality!

Even after having a baby, I don’t understand all of this.

Life and death are a mystery to me.

I suppose all of God’s creation is a mystery and so too is resurrection.

As Christians, there are a slew of things we believe without fully understanding.

If we tried to understand it all, we’d go mad.

We just have to accept that we can’t understand everything.

Yet we can still believe in it anyway.

That’s what faith is all about.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul doesn’t really explain how the resurrection happens.

He doesn’t go into some scientific explanation of how a body will be restored and resurrected.

Perhaps because he doesn’t fully understand it himself.

But he does emphasize how important it is to believe that we will all be resurrected with Christ.

He says without the resurrection; our faith would be futile.

Everything we believe in would be for nothing.

If our bodies were forever reduced to ash and dust in the ground, all that we experienced in our bodies in life would have no purpose.

To not believe in the resurrection, limits our ability to find purpose and meaning to this life.

Everything we experience in this life would be for nothing if we didn’t have that future hope in resurrection.

Because to be resurrected means we experience eternal significance and fulfillment.

On Friday I was studying this text to prepare this sermon when I got the crushing news that my mentor Pastor James Lee died.

It was devastating to hear that he was gone at age 48, and that his church and our Presbytery would now be without him.

As hard as it is to focus on a task like sermon preparation with sad news like that, this passage was probably the most appropriate text to be studying.

I got to thinking about James and what is in store for him now.

I got to thinking about the challenges he faced in this world with his health and his lungs.

How he had to preach with an oxygen tank and often had to say no to activities.

A hard thing to do for that former UT Football player.

As I thought about this chapter in 1 Corinthians, I was filled with hope for my friend James.

The text tells me that his body will be restored and redeemed.

That all of those years of illnesses and interventions will be wiped away and his body will be made new.

I take joy in knowing that his contagious smile will be beaming in the Kingdom of God.

That he will be there, offering a hug to everyone around him.

That his boisterous laugh will fill the air again.

I give thanks for this Good News that we will all be resurrected, body and soul, with Christ.

That all of our being will be restored and transformed.

That all suffering will go away.

That we will experience freedom as the children of God.

Our belief in the resurrection shows that God is faithful.

That God makes unexpected and glorious new beginnings in the drama of salvation.[[1]](#footnote-1)

This is one of the great faith statements we make.

Even though we don’t fully understand it, we believe it.

Theologian Daniel Migliore perhaps puts it best:

“To believe in the resurrection of Christ is to believe that God will not only triumph over the violent death that reigns in human history but also will triumph over the tragic death to which all life is presently subject.

In this comprehensive sense, proclamation of the resurrection of Christ crucified is “gospel”,

good news indeed.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. Migliore 193 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Migliore 196 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)