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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Proper 6 (Pentecost 4), Series B
Saturday, June 16th, 2018
Sunday, June 17th, 2018 (Father's Day)

Sermon: More Fully Clothed
Texts: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Focus Statement: God promises us a resurrection body for eternity.

Function Statement: That the resurrection promise would give them hope in today's earthly struggles.

Sermon Structure: Text-Application

Doctrinal Locus: "...Just as He is risen from the dead, lives, and reigns to all eternity" (SC, 2nd Article of Apostles' Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Last Sunday was the eleventh anniversary of my ordination into the Holy Ministry. As I looked back on the smiling faces in the pictures from that day, I noticed a big difference between my 25-year-old self and myself today: I had more hair back then (and what hair I did have wasn't gray!), and I was about 40 pounds lighter. Some older pastors joke that ministry takes a toll on your body. I think it's just as likely to be *life* in general—or fatherhood, specifically. I didn't have any gray hair until my son Benjamin was born.

After my dad's twenty-fifth high school reunion, he gloated about the fact that the football players and cheerleaders who bothered him in high school had all gone bald or fat (sometimes both!). To which I replied, "And you, of course, look the same as you did in 1973, right Dad?" (Sometimes honoring your father and your mother means keeping them honest).

The reality is that, if you live long enough, all your body parts will wear out. Our bodies don't come with a manufacturer's warranty. Chronic pain, allergies, broken bones, heart attacks, diabetes, cancer, or old age eventually comes. Even my athletic friends who run and swim have undergone surgeries for knee replacements and torn rotator cuffs. Nothing lasts forever.

That’s what the Apostle Paul talks about in our epistle lesson today. Using poetic language, he employs the metaphor of tents to speak of our earthly bodies as temporary dwellings (2 Cor. 5:1-4). He acknowledges that we struggle in life here on earth. Our bodies ache and die. “We groan, being burdened...” (2 Cor. 5:4, ESV).¹ Paul knew better than most about the kinds of pain and suffering the body could be forced to endure. In chapter 11 he lists a catalog of his painful experiences:

“Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned [pummeled with rocks]. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:25-28).

Paul took many a licking—and kept on ticking. But even he longed for the day when he would be freed by death to enter eternal life.

So Paul talks about our earthly bodies as tents that used for a time, but not for eternity. God has other plans for us after we die. And those plans are bigger and better than anything we could imagine. As Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians:

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account” (Phil. 1:21-24).

To live is Christ, to die is gain. What Paul says is true for every believer in Jesus Christ.

And yet we have to be careful that we do not impose upon Paul our own suppositions of the afterlife. For if we do that, we miss the point that Paul is trying to make and—even more tragically—miss out on the wonderful Christian hope that we have in God’s promise of the resurrection. For the goal of the Christian life is not simply to believe in Jesus so that, when we

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

die, our soul goes to heaven. The hope of the Christian life is that Jesus is going to come *down* from heaven again someday to restore the creation, raise our bodies from the dead, and reunite them with our souls to enjoy the new heaven and the new earth. As Jesus says in Revelation, “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev. 21:5).

There is not a total disconnect between earthly life and eternal life in the world to come. While our earthly bodies are temporary—like tents—and will rot and return to dust, God promises us new, glorious, *heavenly* bodies in the resurrection. That is why he writes: “For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1). Our eternal dwelling is the new body that we will wear when Christ raises us from the dead.

After rising from the dead, Jesus still has a physical body that people were able to see, hear, and touch. He is still able to eat and drink. And yes, even though he is able to walk through walls and vanish at will, he still has a physical body. There is something different about Jesus’ resurrection body, and still other things the same. For instance, he still has the marks of the nails and in his hands and feet, but the wounds no longer hinder him. And because our hope of the resurrection is always connected to Christ’s resurrection, he promises to “transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body...” (Phil. 3:21a).

Mark Seifrid writes, “The hope of the gospel is a resurrected body and not the bodiless existence of the naked soul.”² As Paul writes, “For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be *further* clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (2 Cor. 5:4).

² Mark A. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, in series *Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), Kindle ed.

This passage of Scripture reminds me of one of my favorite books: *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis. In this novel Lewis imagines what it would be like if a bunch of damned souls in hell got to take a bus tour of heaven for a day. Himself part of the tour and a character in the story, Lewis meets George MacDonald, a famous writer, who guides him through heaven and allows him to listen in on conversations between the damned and the redeemed, who are called the “Bright Spirits.” The saints in heaven are more real, more solid, than the ghosts, who cringe at the buzzing bees and the sharp blades of grass beneath their feet. Drops of water splashing from the nearby river rip like bullets through their ghostly forms. The ghosts are transparent like glass, but the solid people cast shadows because the saints, are... well, more *substantial*, than the others, and they relish in the warmth of the light and the coolness of the water and grass. They are suited for it because that’s how God made them.

You may ask, why is there grass in Lewis’s vision of heaven? Because bare feet need something to walk on, of course! Our bodies are made from the earth, and our bodies are meant to enjoy the earth. Our bodies are not a shell or husk that we must discard in order to free our spirits. That would be Gnosticism, not Christianity. Bodies are an integral part of who we are. On the Sixth Day of Creation, God looked at everything he made—including our bodies—and said, “Behold, it is very good!” (Gen. 1:31). Bodies aren’t *bad*. Bodies aren’t a burden. Bodies aren’t immaterial. God says bodies are *good*! And because bodies matter to God, they matter to us. After all, we will enjoy our bodies forever in eternity, using them to serve God and worship him in the new heaven and new earth!

To be clear: I am in no way denying the fact that, when a Christian dies, his or her soul immediately departs to be with Christ. Jesus told the thief on the cross, “*Today* you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). And Paul says that we would rather be “away from the body and

at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8). But that intermediate state shouldn’t be our focus. Instead of speculating on what happens between death and the final resurrection on the Last Day, we should set our hope on the Second Coming of Jesus.³ We cannot assert things the Scriptures do not tell us. “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7).

And yet, “we are always of good courage” (2 Cor. 5:6; cf. v. 8). Even though the Bible calls death our enemy (1 Cor. 15:26), the Christian need not fear death. The grave could not contain Christ, who died and rose again. And the grave cannot contain any who believe in him. Christ died to free us from death and rose again for our justification. Our guilt is atoned for, and our sins are washed away. Now in joyful obedience, “whether we are at home [in the body] or away [in the spirit], we make it our aim to please him” (2 Cor. 5:9).

Paul ends this section of his letter with a rather stunning statement that at first appears out of place: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). The sudden mention of Judgment Day certainly has to do with the last things (eschatology), but what does it have to do with the resurrection? Quite a bit, actually! For one thing, it is *in* our resurrection bodies, that we will stand before the throne of God and give an account of our life on earth (cf. Rev. 20:4-6, 11-15). Furthermore, as if to underscore the importance of our physical bodies and earthly existence, we must give an account “for what [we have] done *in* the body...” (2 Cor. 5:10). What we do in life has repercussions for what happens in life *after* death. Or, as General Maximus puts it in one of my favorite movies, *The Gladiator*: “What we do in life echoes in eternity.”

³ In his *Christian Dogmatics*, well does Pieper say, “Holy Write reveals but little of the state of the souls between death and the resurrection. In speaking of the last things, it directs our gaze primarily to Judgment Day and the events clustering around it” (Francis Piper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 3 [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953], 511).

Thankfully, what we do or do not do in life does not portend our final fate. We are saved by grace through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ's blood shed on the cross saves us from our sins, not our own good works. If you believe in Christ, you don't have to be afraid on Judgment Day, because God isn't keeping score. Indeed, "his anger is for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime" (Ps. 30:5). As David sings in Psalm 103: "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (vv. 10-12).

Paul alludes to this grace when he writes that "we have a building from God" (2 Cor. 5:1). The reward of our resurrection bodies is not something that we earn or buy or merit in anyway. We simply "have" it, because it's a gift from God. It's "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," which is another way to say that God builds it, we don't. In fact, on his way to the cross, Jesus assured us that he goes to prepare a place for us (John 14:2). "And if I go and prepare a place for you," Jesus promises, "I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am you may be also" (John 14:3).

So don't give up or lose hope, even if you must endure incredible suffering and pain in this life. The tent of your earthly body is only a temporary dwelling. Your body matters. It's a gift from God. But the *eternal* home built by Jesus, "the carpenter's son!" (Matt. 13:55), will be beautiful beyond belief. I can only imagine what that body will be like! "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). In the name of Jesus. Amen.