

Texts: 1 Corinthians 15:1-26, 51-57

Subject: The Resurrection Body

Theme: What Next?

Seventh Sunday of Easter; May 24, 2020, *Online Worship; Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and the Risen Lord Jesus, Amen.

Today is the last Sunday of the Season of Easter. And yet, we continue to proclaim: Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Yes, we are the ones who share this news of the risen Jesus. Thursday was Ascension Day, when we remember that Jesus ascended to Heaven. So with the Apostles, all the disciples, and the people of the world, we're waiting for Him to come back, and we're wondering, *what's next?*

What is next?

This week was graduation for so many. We grieve that they are not able to walk across stages, enjoy that ritual, celebrate with their friends. Some are trying to plan for college, will they go away? Will they stay? Will school be online in the Fall? We just don't seem to know yet. What will summer be like here in Vegas? It will be hot, sure - but will there be tourists to come and swim in hotel pools? Will we attend summer concerts and events? Will there be summer weddings and celebrations? Will those be online too? What about summer movies - are they a thing of the past? Will there be murder hornets?

What's next for us? In our world, we are awaiting a reopening of our society, of businesses, and restaurants, hotels and casinos, libraries, schools, workplaces, and more. We can't see the future, and while many warn of the possibility of more Coronavirus infections in the Fall, we move forward faithfully and carefully, with as much wisdom as we can find, and caution for the sake of our neighbors. We hope and pray

that all would remain healthy and safe, and would do nothing to bring about more illness in our community. Our church council meeting this week centered on discussion about what is needed for us to begin to gather again in person, and what worship will look like when that day comes, but until then, we'll be putting plans together, based on recommendations from medical experts, our church leaders, along with input from you, the body of Christ in the world. In the building and out of this building, *we are the church*. Say it with me: *We are the church*. We remember that while the building may be mostly closed for now, the church is alive and breathing, living, sharing, learning, healing, praying, and proclaiming - Jesus is Lord. He is Risen! He is risen indeed! We are Easter people. We are not afraid, but bold to share our faith, to tell about our friend, our brother, our hero, our savior Jesus.

So it was for those first apostles and early Christians too. They disagreed about some things, but when Paul heard about his friends back in Corinth arguing about the resurrection, he had to include this last bit in this letter to them. There were people talking about what happened to the bodies of believers after they died, and some were arguing that our bodies would not be raised, but that it was the spirit that was raised to be with God in heaven. So much of this was still new to them, there were not thousands of years of Christian tradition and teaching to give them guidance and perspective. So they were figuring it out, they were working through it. Paul reminds them that they are in the process of being saved - it's not complete yet. Their baptismal journey is ongoing. And he reminds them of the good news he first shared with them, that he passed on, just as it was passed on to him:

Jesus was born of a human mother, and took on flesh.

Jesus lived a human life, and died a human death.

Jesus was raised from the dead - and appeared in his body to the disciples.

Jesus was fully God and fully human flesh. Jesus was called our *Emmanuel* - God with us, and came to be with us as friend, teacher, leader, healer, savior. He had a body. So do we. So people wondered, rightly so, *what's next* for our bodies? It's an important question now, just as it was then. Paul taught that if you didn't think the dead could be raised, then you were saying that Jesus wasn't raised, and therefore none of this makes a difference. It's all useless and unhelpful and in vain - the proclamation of the gospel, the church, the teaching, even faith itself. We're all dead in our sins. We're all worm food. We don't want to think that, but the reality of death is right there in front of us. More than ever for many of us.

Death is as real as it gets. We live our whole lives trying not to die. We want to do things that are meaningful, not meaningless. We want to live life to the fullest and work and participate in the world, hoping that it is all for a reason. This weekend, we remember those who fought and died in service to our country. They sacrificed their bodies, their time, relationships, and futures, maybe because they believed in the cause, maybe out of duty, tradition, or lack of choices. We remember them all and give thanks, and pray that our children - that anyone's children would be spared that calling and sacrifice in the future. But we do not know what's next.

After the heartbreaking video of the death of Ahmaud Arbury, last week we heard of Breonna Taylor, shot in her own home by an off duty police officer looking for a suspect who was already in custody. Death is always in the news. Now we hear nearly

100,000 deaths in our country alone from Coronavirus, others at the hands of a gunman this week, 97 killed in a plane crash in Pakistan. What can this all mean?

We have seen too much death in our nation and in our world. I have to imagine it was just as bad in Paul's time. The Apostle had been all over the world, in fact, *he* was one who had persecuted those Christians, had presided over their deaths, and stalked and hunted down others. Paul lives with his regrets and knows his failings, and here calls himself *one untimely born* - one born at the wrong time, as the risen Christ had blinded him, and appeared to him, revealed Himself there in bodily form on the road to Damascus. Paul's body mattered to Jesus. Jesus' body mattered, and yet they hung him on a cross, there to die in the presence of his mother, for the crime of speaking out against authority, not knowing what they did, but that God would use it for the healing of the world. He stayed there, with the blood that ran down from his hands and side as the evidence of his bodily death.

It was a common belief at the time of this early church that the spirit or the soul, the ψυχή, was separate from the flesh, or the σάρξ, and that spirit was our holy essence, but flesh was the sinful meat we walk around in. Bodies were yucky, dirty. We know what bodies do - we don't want to let God know about all that nasty stuff. God knows. This must be the reason people went out and bought up all the toilet paper two months ago. Bodies are dirty. We carry those ideas with us, too, but I wonder if we need to start thinking more holistically.

As Ivy and I walked around Lone Mountain Thursday morning, more than six feet from anyone else, huffing and puffing our breath, we felt the muscles in our legs working hard, and with our eyes saw the steep trails to the summit we chose not to attempt. We

felt the sweat begin to seep out from our brows, and marveled at the beautiful blue sky, as our walking became a prayer in motion there in the Northwest part of our valley. If we are just flesh, it was just exercise, to keep up the maintenance on the moving parts that facilitate our thinking, that house our holy parts deep inside. But maybe it's more? Maybe God cares about our bodies too, Maybe our bodies matter just as much to God as our minds, our hearts, our spirits. Too many have spent far too much energy despising bodies that they feel aren't right, aren't working well enough, or too different from other bodies. We abuse bodies, shame them, ridicule others for their bodies, and make up arbitrary ideals of what bodies should be. We are distraught when bodies won't do what we want, or produce what we'd hoped they would, or begin to slow and change. If God loves us all, and God loves ALL of us, that means that our bodies are loved by God as well. Did you catch that? *If God loves us all, and God loves ALL of us, that means that our bodies are loved by God as well.*

We care for our bodies and those of the people around us. Many have asked if we'll be hosting the summer cooling station in Edwins Hall soon - it will be well over 100 degrees by next week. So many in our valley walk around hungry, and though food ministries, we help care for their bodies. Last week our church received a grant from the Grand Canyon Synod for \$3500 to help benefit outreach and food ministry here at Reformation, and we'll need some help bagging and delivering groceries for neighbors in need. If you know someone in need of food, please let us know, and reach out if you'd like to help out with shopping or delivery of food bags. Being the body of Christ means we help care for the bodies of our neighbors.

Yes, God so loves us that our bodies are raised up too. If they're not, than Jesus is not, and Jesus is, so we are, and our bodies are us. ALL will be made alive in Christ. What will they look like? Will they be the same? Will they be more? We can't say. But we can say what has been passed on to us:

Christ has ben raised form the dead. This is for a reason, it is not meaningless, we are the body of Christ in the world, in this building and out, and we will be with Him too.

Paul writes to his friends, to tell the mystery. They are waiting for the return of the savior, and some expected it to happen sooner rather than later. But, we know that no matter the time, we are ALL in Christ here and now. We believe and are baptized and given a share of that Holy Spirit in us, and are united with Him now, and will be with Him forever. So for now, we better act like it. We better use and enjoy these bodies in the ways that are helpful and healthy and holy. We use them to the good of our neighbor, we live for the sake of others, for our children and friends, and lovers, and ones who need a little help with their bodies, and their spirits too. We share the good news of Jesus, who lived and died, who took on our shame, our dysphoria, our physical impairments, our self-hatred, our prejudices, and all our sin to that cross so that we would not be the same but we ALL would be changed. And that's what's next: We *will* be made new, flesh and blood, body and soul, and welcomed into the embrace of eternal life with Him.

Death no longer has power over us, no sting, no victory. We know these bodies will not last forever on earth, but are redeemed in Jesus Christ our Lord, and they are good, and they will be ours, just as we are His forever. Amen and Amen.