

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD
Sermon for the 7th Sunday after the Epiphany, 2019
1 Corinthians 15:21-26

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is taken from 1 Corinthians 15:21-26: ²¹ **For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a man.** ²² **For, as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.** ²³ **However, each one in his own turn: Christ is the firstfruits. After that, when He comes, those who belong to Christ.** ²⁴ **Then the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom to God, the Father, after He has put an end to all dominion, authority and power.** ²⁵ **For He must reign until God has put all His enemies under His feet.** ²⁶ **The last enemy that will be destroyed is death...**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

This year has been one of the longest seasons after Epiphany that we have had for a while. Throughout this season we have heard how at Jesus' baptism, heaven was opened, with the Holy Spirit coming down on Him in bodily form like a dove. We have heard the voice that came from heaven proclaiming the Father's love for His only Son Jesus. We have heard about many different miracles Jesus performed, further revealing who He truly is. We have also heard how Jesus, as the Word, has complete authority over all things, and He has further taught us through the speaking of beatitudes. All this reveals Jesus as God – the One who has come into this world to go the way of the cross for us. He is the One who has brought salvation for us, and so we rejoice in the forgiveness of sins, and the free gift of eternal life.

The Lenten season is not far away now. Historically, Lent developed as a season of preparation for Holy Baptism. Liturgically and theologically, Lent gives the Church the opportunity to refocus on the significance of Holy Baptism. The daily drowning of contrition and repentance, which characterises the entire Christian life of discipleship, is deliberately intensified during Lent as a renewal of faith and life in Christ. This repentance is always the divine work of the Holy Spirit through the Law and the Gospel. The Law crucifies the old Adam, and the Gospel raises up the new man in us. Lent is properly penitential when it brings the cross to sinners and sinners to the cross of Christ as the fountain and source of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Forgiveness, life, and salvation is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus Himself. 1 Corinthians 15 is the longest chapter in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, and its subject is resurrection: first Christ's resurrection and then the **resurrection of the dead**. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the **resurrection of the dead** is the focus of our sermon today.

Many scoff at the idea of any kind of **resurrection of the dead**. Many have the belief that once you die, that's it - you cease to exist, and there is no afterlife. That is why you need to make the most of the life you have NOW. They behave just as Paul says, "*Let us eat and drink! For tomorrow we die,*" (1 Cor. 15:32). Life is what YOU make of it. Quite often the way people live their lives, and the foolish decisions they make, only go to show their ignorance and unbelief in such matters as life after death. There is certainly no belief in **the resurrection of the dead**.

The doctrine of **the resurrection of the dead** is the specific, unique glory of Christian revelation that can only be believed through faith. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the heart of the Gospel. The **resurrection of the dead** is the glorious hope and comfort of our faith. We know and believe that because of Christ's own death and resurrection, when we die, our soul is immediately with Jesus in heaven,¹ but the time will come when, our soul *and* body, will experience the eternal bliss of eternal glory; that our present flesh will, in time, as St. Paul declares, "*be fashioned unto like His glorious body,*" (Phil. 3:21).

In a world full of sorrow and death, this brings us much comfort, especially when we are faced with the mortality of our own flesh. Death is the result of our sin. Through one man's *disobedience*, the tragedy of human suffering and death had become the common lot of all. Paul tells us that **since death came through a man,... all die**. Because Adam died, all mankind must die.

How fitting, then, that it would be through the *obedience* of another man, the second Adam, **Christ**, that **all will be made alive**. While Paul spells this out more fully in his Letter to the Romans,² here he sketches the Adam-Christ

¹ Luke 23:43

² Romans 5:12-21

typology in the briefest terms. Just as Adam's sin and death affected not only himself but all humanity, so the Corinthians, and we, need to appreciate that Christ's resurrection was not only for His own benefit. No, through this Man, the resurrection from the dead to eternal life had become the destiny of all believers. For just as Adam was the head of the old humanity, so that his fall left a legacy of sin and death to all, so Christ stands as head of the new humanity to be made alive in Him. All people, believers and unbelievers alike, will be raised bodily on the Last Day,³ but it is only **those who belong to Christ**, who **will be made alive**. This means that those who have been baptised into Christ's own death and resurrection will enter eternal bliss, while unbelievers will be cast into the lake of fire, which the Book of Revelation describes as "*the second death*" (Rev. 20:14-15), that is, an eternity in hell, complete separation of both body and soul from God, where there is nothing but the gnashing of teeth and eternal torment, where the cry to God for mercy will go unheeded forever.

So it is that we surely look forward to **the resurrection of the dead** when we, together with our loved ones whom we have buried, will stand both body and soul together in the joyous presence of Jesus forever more, where there is no more death, pain, or sorrow.

However, that is a day in the future, a day that has not yet arrived, and it is easy for us to lose patience. It is said that patience is a virtue, meaning that one has the ability to wait for something without getting frustrated. Yet how much patience can one have? While we might say that we have some patience, yet I am sure that that patience soon runs out! We grow impatient with those in authority over us, we grow impatient with one another, we grow impatient in waiting for something to arrive in the mail, we grow impatient in waiting for it to rain. Paul encourages us not to lose heart and become impatient with the coming **resurrection of the dead**. He says,²³ **However, each one in his own turn: Christ is the firstfruits. After that, when He comes, those who belong to Christ**. The end is not yet, but everything will surely happen in its proper order. We need to be patient. For Christ, the resurrection took place some many centuries ago; for those who have believed in Him, the **resurrection of the dead** will take place when He returns in glory on Judgment Day. The first sheaf was from a grave outside Jerusalem on the first Easter morning some two thousand years ago; the harvest will be from graves all over the world when our risen Lord will appear on clouds of glory, and His own will rise from their graves and will be caught up to meet Him in the skies.⁴

At the appointed time, Christ's Second Coming will usher in the consummation of the age. Paul says that **the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom to God, the Father, after He has put an end to all dominion, authority and power**. A good way to think of our Lord's Second Coming is to compare the triumphant Messiah as a nobleman who had journeyed to a far country to receive a kingdom and then to return.⁵ All authority had been entrusted to Him for this assignment.⁶ In the course of His campaigns against the enemies of the kingdom, He had bound up the "strong man" (Satan) and plundered his goods⁷ so that Satan's former possessions now belong to the Conqueror. Then He **hands over the kingdom to God, the Father, after He has put an end to all dominion, authority and power**.

Christ's triumph over these powers, the putting of **all His enemies under His feet**, fulfilled God's plan as it had been laid down in Psalm 110:1. There David says: *The LORD has said to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet!"* Paul cites this psalm freely to show the divinely ordained necessity that Christ should triumph over death and ascend to the Father's right hand, where He is enthroned and rules in the midst of His defeated enemies. His regency would continue until all His enemies had been subjugated completely.

Finally, Paul tells us that ²⁶ **The last enemy that will be destroyed is death....** A little later Paul, in the same Letter, calls death an "enemy" with a vicious "sting": "*the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law*" (1 Cor. 15:56). Humankind fears death as a hostile and destructive force⁸, and the wages of sin is death.⁹ As long as people continue to die as the wages of their sin, inherited from Adam, who rebelled against the Creator, God's good and gracious will for His creation is not yet brought to completion. But after all Christ's people have been raised to life at His Second Coming, there will be no more death.¹⁰

Dear friends, Jesus holds all the power. His work of redemption has won **the resurrection of the dead** which Pauls

³ Acts 24:15

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:16

⁵ Luke 19:12

⁶ Matthew 11:27; 28:18

⁷ Mark 3:22-27

⁸ Hebrews 2:15

⁹ Romans 6:23

¹⁰ Revelation 21:4

speaks of, for us. Jesus' own resurrection demonstrates it. He died for man, the *whole* man. He is the quickening, life-giving, spirit for the whole man. His work was designed to restore us, the whole man, to the perfection of heaven. The confirmation to the heavenly man begins in souls here and is perfected in the resurrection of the body and its reunion with the soul in heaven. His purpose was to destroy all death. Indeed, Paul himself tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:26 that *the last enemy to be destroyed is death*.

How are the dead raised up? By the power and mercy of God, operative through our Lord Jesus Christ. Even though for now we sin and repent, rise and fall, are born and die, we look forward with all hope and confidence to **the resurrection of the dead**. Just as Christ rose from the dead, in the same way we, too, will be brought to new life. And there is nothing that the devil or his minions of death-wielding demons can do about it, for the battle has been won.

Just as Christ Jesus Himself rose to new life after being put to death on that Roman cross, God will not abandon us to the grave after our own flesh loses its life. We can be glad, secure in the reality of the empty tomb. We can rejoice with our whole being in the certainty of our resurrection. We do not stand on a learned doctrine. We confess a doctrine based on a historic reality. Therefore, we can shout, "*I believe in the resurrection of the dead, and the life everlasting.*" Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Lord God, You are gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and full of constant love; You are good to all, and Your kindness is on all You have made. We come before You with confidence, offering our worship and bringing our prayers.

We thank You above all else for the love You have shown us in Christ Jesus, who was put to death for our sins and raised to life that we might be justified before You. We confess our many sins to You, and acknowledge that we have not deserved Your great mercy. But grant us who have confessed our sins joy in this, that You for Christ's sake, according to Your promise, forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all our wrong-doings.

Forgive us especially our sins of despising and neglecting Your Word; in Your grace do not take it from us. By Your Holy Spirit help us to treasure it, and to use it with sincere and open hearts. Grant that it may take root in us as good seed in good ground, grow up, and bring forth much fruit to the glory of Your name.

Save and defend Your Church from all evil. Bless all preaching and teaching of Your Word of life. Help all Your children to be obedient to Your truth, conscientious in their daily work, patient in sufferings, and upheld by the blessed hope of everlasting life. In particular, we ask Your blessing on the pastors of the AELC and the ULMA. Give them joy in Your service. Guard and keep them by Your power from all dangers of body and soul, and bless their work with an abundant harvest.

We pray for our government. Give us unselfish and trustworthy leaders, and a society that reflects high moral values.

Bless our homes, and make them dwelling-places of Your Spirit, places where Christ is honoured in the teaching and love of parents, and in the obedience of children.

We ask Your mercy on those who are sick; help them to know and rejoice in the grace and healing power of Christ. Comfort the sorrowing; be with the lonely; support the aged and infirm. Give faith in Your power and mercy to any who are struggling with doubt or depression, temptation or trial; teach them to know that the grace of Christ is always sufficient, and remind them that Your power is strongest when they are weak.

Let the word of Christ in all its richness live in our hearts, and help us all to receive the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls. We ask this in the name and for the sake of Jesus our Saviour. Amen.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Genesis 45:3-15

³ Then Joseph told his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?"

However, his brothers could not answer him because they were terrified at his presence. ⁴ Joseph told his brothers, "Please come closer to me!"

Therefore, they went closer. He said: "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ Now, however, do not be sad or angry with yourselves for selling me here! For it was to save lives that God has sent me ahead of

you. ⁶ For two years now there has been a famine in the land, and there are five more years when there will be no ploughing or harvesting. ⁷ God has sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on the earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. ⁸ So now, it has not been you who have sent me here, but God. He has also made me a father to Pharaoh, master over his entire household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Go up to my father quickly and tell him, 'This is what your son Joseph has said: "God has made me master of all Egypt. Come down to me immediately! ¹⁰ You shall live in the

region of Goshen, and you yourself, your children and your grandchildren will be near me with your flocks, your herds and everything else that you have! ¹¹ I shall provide for you there. For there will be five more years of famine. Otherwise you, your family and all who belong to you will lose your property.” ¹² Look! Your own eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin can see that it is my mouth that is speaking to you. ¹³ Tell my father about all the honour given to me in Egypt and about everything that you have seen and bring my father down here quickly!”

¹⁴ Then he fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. ¹⁵ Joseph kissed all his brothers and wept over them. After that, his brothers talked with him.

1 Corinthians 15:21-26, 30-42

²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a man. ²² For, as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ However, each one in his own turn: Christ is the firstfruits. After that, when He comes, those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom to God, the Father, after He has put an end to all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For He must reign until God has put all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy that will be destroyed is death...

³⁰ Why are we also risking danger every hour? ³¹ Fellow-Christians, I die every day. It is as sure as the boast that I make about you in Christ Jesus our Lord. ³² If, like an ordinary man, I fought wild animals at Ephesus, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink! For tomorrow we die.” ³³ Do not let anyone deceive you! “Bad company corrupts good habits.” ³⁴ Become sober, as you ought to be, and do not sin any longer! For there are some who are ignorant of God. I say this to your shame.

³⁵ However, someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” ³⁶ How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ When you sow, you do not sow the body that will be but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or

one of the other seeds. ³⁸ However, God gives it a body as He has determined and to each of the seeds its own body. ³⁹ Not all flesh is the same. Human beings have one kind of flesh, animals have another kind of flesh, birds have another kind of flesh, and fish have still another. ⁴⁰ There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; but the splendour of the heavenly bodies is different from that of the earthly bodies. ⁴¹ The splendour of the sun is different from the splendour of the moon, and the splendour of the stars is different again. Even one star differs in splendour from another star. ⁴² It will be like that with the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in decay: it is raised without decay.

Luke 6:27-38

²⁷ “However, I tell you who are listening: Love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you! ²⁸ Bless those who curse you! Pray for those who mistreat you! ²⁹ If someone strikes you on the cheek, offer him the other also! If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic as well! ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you and, if someone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back! ³¹ Treat other people the same as you want them to treat you! ³² If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ For, if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you expect to get it back, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners to get equal payment back. ³⁵ Rather, love your enemies! Do good and lend, without expecting to get anything back! Then your reward will be great, and you will be the children of the Most High, because He is kind to ungrateful and wicked people. ³⁶ Be merciful, as your Father also is merciful! ³⁷ “Stop judging, and you will certainly not be judged. Stop condemning, and you will certainly not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.