

WGUMC July 23, 2017 "The Resurrection of the Body"
I Corinthians 15:35-45; 51-57

You can tell a lot about a person by looking at their hands. Pianists are sensitive souls. They typically have longer, thinner fingers than non-pianists. Farmers work hard and have the callouses to show for it. My grandmother lived for years and years with a lot of pain from arthritis. I remember that her finger joints were so big and swollen she couldn't open her hands.

Our bodies tell stories. When I had surgery a couple of years ago, I acquired a few new scars and it got me thinking about how I could tell my life story through my various scars. There's the one on my ankle from the IV when I was a toddler and hospitalized with meningitis. The scar is now three inches long, which means that it must have grown with me, as some of our scars do. There's also the scar on my head when I was in junior high and tied my horse to a metal stand holding up one of those gas tanks you see on farms, not knowing it was empty.

The horse shied and pulled it over. I ran under the barrel to protect the horse and it bonked me on the head. I guess that was my first PhD (Permanent Head Damage).

I could go on, but you get my drift. Our bodies tell our stories whether we want them to or not. But today I want to focus on the story that the Bible tells about our bodies. It starts at the very beginning, in the Book of Genesis. Scars and all, our bodies are one of God's best creations, made in God's image from the dust of exploding stars. When God saw us, God was pleased and pronounced all the Creation, including our bodies, "very good." [Gen 1:31]

Despite all the abuse we piled upon our bodies, despite all the violence we did to others' bodies, despite a very long history of sins of and against the flesh, God still wanted our bodies, so much so that God decided to take on a body. God's Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth. [John 1:14] But still we did not honor bodies, least of all Jesus'

body. While a few women reached out to touch him and one washed his feet with her hair, the powers that be cursed and condemned his body. Then the soldiers stripped and bloodied it and nailed it to a tree. When the spirit left his body, the soldiers broke it and left others to bury it.

As Isaiah puts it, "So marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance," but even then God loved that body. [Isaiah 52:14] Out of violence, God brought a victory. Death was not going to win. What God made, God was determined to save. And so on the third day, God opened the grave.

The resurrection of Christ is the climax of the story of our bodies, but not the end of it. By resurrecting the body of Jesus, God made clear that God loves our bodies enough to resurrect them, too. That was the message that Paul was trying to preach, but he had a little trouble getting that idea across to the Greeks. They didn't have the Books of Moses. They had Plato and Socrates. They didn't think much of physical bodies.

They called them cesspools of lust, prisons of pain and dungeons of decay. They didn't believe that God had ever created them or that God would ever want to save them. The Greeks yearned to live in a disembodied, purely spiritual world, and so they waited for death when they would be released from their bodies. You might think this is a very old-fashioned way of looking at things, but I'll have you know this way of thinking is still going strong today.

There are days when all of us would like to be released from our bodies. This past Easter I was thinking about the women at the empty tomb who wondered who had taken Jesus' body. I could relate to their confusion. Sometimes I wake up in the morning wanting to know: who came in the middle of the night, stole my body and gave me this one? I think a lot of us are not sure that we want to believe in the resurrection of THIS body!

So I hope that Paul, writing to a Greek audience in Corinth and hoping to convince them of the resurrection of the body, can convince us. When asked what sort of body is raised, he goes to great lengths to explain that there is a physical body and then a spiritual one. The physical body dies, before the spiritual body can rise. So somehow our bodies go through a change, Paul says, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet." But exactly what that means and how this transformation occurs, no one knows. Even Paul thinks it's a mystery.

We moderns don't appreciate mysteries. That's why we ask ourselves, why should we believe in the resurrection of the body? Aside from the fact that Jesus experienced it and his disciples witnessed it and his followers have for ages believed in it, I can think of several excellent reasons. For one thing, we believe in the resurrection of the body because we want to affirm the goodness of all bodies. Heaven knows that the

Church hasn't had a good record of affirming bodies, and we want to reject once and for all that old Greek idea that our physical being is evil and that our body is our enemy. This is more important than it may seem. Unless we affirm the goodness of our bodies, we aren't likely to take very good care of them.

Knowing that God loves our bodies and wants them back again can help us treat our bodies like the temple of the Holy Spirit that they were made to be. If we believed that our bodies are holy, then we wouldn't waste our time worrying that they aren't tall enough or slim enough or pretty enough or young enough nor would we judge others' bodies even more harshly.

If we really believed that this physical body is destined to become a spiritual body then we would be less likely to bombard it with addictive substances, cancer-causing chemicals, smog-filled air, cholesterol-laden food. We might even be willing to work for and to vote for affordable and

accessible health care for every body. (Pray for the vote on Tuesday!)

If we really believed that God created our bodies and called them very good, we wouldn't feel ashamed that we are sexual beings nor would we pass that shame onto our children. We wouldn't treat our bodies as if they were something dirty nor would we act in church as if God were offended by our sexuality.

If we believed in the resurrection of the body, we could celebrate the divine origin of the love we make with other bodies. And we could teach our children that true love is when one body connects with another body, in mutual respect and commitment, honesty and integrity, trust and vulnerability, equality and safety, charity and humility, for when bodies meet with that kind of love, that's when they both commune with God.

If that isn't reason enough to believe in the resurrection of the body, there's more. If we believed that God loves and redeems bodies, then we would find it easier to cope with the changes in our aging bodies. It would be easier to face the diagnosis, bear the pain, endure the treatment, recover from the surgery, and accept the reality, knowing that our body will be free of all pain and disease in eternity.

If we really believed that we were made in the image of God and on our way to becoming a new creation, then we wouldn't abuse our bodies or allow anyone else to abuse them. There would be no battered-spouse syndrome. Nor would we stand idly by as the bodies of millions of people the world over are abused. We would stand up for those who are bent over in pain, doubled over by hunger, run over by war, poverty and oppression. Can you see how important it is to believe in the resurrection?

We believe in the resurrection of the body because in this promise is our victory over all the forces that try to hurt bodies. As Paul says, "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?...Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

So you see, there are lots and lots of good reasons to believe in this mystery, Jesus being the best one. Just to sum up: We believe in the resurrection of the body because we believe that God made us with bodies and won't save us without them. And we believe in the resurrection of the body because we know that God wants nothing more than that we would love our bodies and the some-bodies, the no-bodies, and the every-bodies who need our loving, too. After all, that's what Jesus told us to do. So, Jesus, we make this vow to you: until the day of our resurrection, when our death is swallowed

up in your victory, these bodies we will love in remembrance of
you. Amen.