

Pako Evening Service: 2/10/2016

Scripture Readings: John 11:17-44; 1 Cor 15:35-58; LD 22 Q&A 57. Sermon: "He lives and so shall we"

Congregation, one of the most fundamental expressions of our faith is that we believe in the resurrection of the dead! We nearly recite that every Sunday evening in the Apostles' Creed. Every time we drive past a cemetery or attend a funeral that's what we believe as Christians. We also believe that our soul is taken to heaven when we die and that on resurrection day we will be given new and glorified bodies. They will be joined with our soul to glorify our victorious God and Saviour forever.

Now if some unbeliever were to ask you, "Where did you get that 'poppy-cock story' from, what would you say?" Be careful how you answer, for the unbeliever knows as well as we do that our bodies go into the grave. Our bodies decompose and after a few months they are unrecognisable and a few years after that, all that remains are a few bones and dust. So don't be flippant about how you answer. Yet, we may say with respect and confidence that because Jesus rose from the grave so shall we! Jesus' resurrection from the dead, the first fruit from the dead if you like, is the basis, the sure hope we will also be raised.

I dare say most if not all of us have experienced the phone call or email that announces the death of someone we know. And even though it may be expected, it still comes as a surprise and most times as a shock. Now that raises the question, what do you understand about death? When Christians are told that someone has died they understand that to mean the breath of God has left the person's body. And for those of us who have seen that first hand, we can even see a marked difference in their physical appearance.

And at that time we weep with each other and we lean on each other, but based upon the evidence in Scripture we also say of the Christian, "He or she lives and one day will again be united with a glorious body!" So in a sense we have a 'double' comfort. We know that our soul is with the Lord immediately when we breathe our last, and our body will be raised glorious to be reunited with our soul on resurrection day. I say that the believer's soul is with the Lord immediately for Jesus makes that very point in John 11:25-26, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" [Jn 11:25-26].

So at the moment of death the believing soul is with the Saviour in heaven. We don't need to say any more prayers, or make appeals to someone's extra brownie points, for that is all a worthless exercise. Nor do we speak to the breathless body during a funeral service. Interestingly, when it comes to our souls, the Bible's emphasis is on the fact that the believer's soul is with the Lord. Of course, that still leaves us with some questions. How do our loved ones enjoy the Saviour without their glorified bodies? Can they be fully happy and satisfied even without a body? Do they see Jesus? Are they fully conscious? Do they recognize other loved ones already in heaven?

We have to admit we don't have all the answers. But this we know for certain, that when a Christian dies, we know they live because the Bible says they live. It is not just John 11:25-26 that says that, so do other Scriptures. For instance, consider the words of Jesus to the thief as He hung upon the cross, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk 23:43). Or, listen to the words of Paul in Philippians, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" or 2 Cor 5:8; "We ... would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8). Such language indicates to us that life after death with Christ is conscious, joyful, and better than anything here on earth, even though it is life without a body and therefore incomplete. That is our confidence and hope as Christians! Now we are not all on the same page here.

The Jehovah Witnesses and the Seventh-day Adventists deny this comforting teaching. Although both groups believe that someday our bodies will be raised from the grave, the Jehovah's Witnesses believe there is no soul that survives when the body dies. The SDA's believe that after death the soul plunges into a dark and dreamless sleep without any awareness of time or place or existence until the alarm clock goes off on Judgment Day. Our Roman Catholic friends believe there is a place between heaven and earth, purgatory, where our soul waits until enough prayers are raised for its release into heaven.

However, unlike them, we believe Scripture to teach that we will be with Christ as soon as the breath of life leaves our body. Jesus debated this with the Sadducees who did not believe in angels and said there was no resurrection. Jesus showed them that Scripture teaches a continued life after death. Jesus said in Mat 22:31-32, "But about the resurrection of the dead – have you not read what God said to you, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead but of the living." In other words, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and every other believer who has died in the Lord, are alive with their God in glory! God is not the god of dead bodies and sleeping souls. By Jesus

teaching this, he is telling them and us of God's covenant faithfulness. Once God has covenanted with Abraham or with you or me or one of our loved ones that he will be our God forever, He never let's go of such a covenant or of His covenant partner.

Jesus himself said, "that he would never leave us." Once God has established communion with us, it is an eternal communion and can never be interrupted or broken, not even by death! Paul emphasizes the same thing in Rom 8:38-39, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." So when a loved one dies, we say with confidence, "Yet shall they live." They are "taken immediately after this life to Christ their head." What a great comfort and strength and security this gives us poor, forgiven, sinful creatures. Death is not the end for you or me or any loved one who knows the Lord.

But now the more difficult! What about the physical body? After all, God made us body and soul and they belong together. Neither one, all by itself is truly "me." And it is at this junction we need to be careful for if we place too much emphasis on the soul, it may lead us to say that the body is unimportant. The church at Corinth behaved in a way that showed that they thought only spiritual things mattered and not the things done by the body. They were wrong! Furthermore, too much emphasis on the immortality of the soul has led some like the Hindus and other New Age Movements and many modern-day cults to say that a person's soul is a jewel imprisoned in the cage of a temporary body and only death brings release or freedom. That's equally wrong.

Of course, an emphasis on the body at the expense of the soul is equally bad. The whole body-building cult, the worship of sports and sporting heroes, the idolizing of slim and sleek bodies, more than amply demonstrates this. Let's be honest, we live in a society that is obsessed about how one looks. But those who live only for the body, its appetites, its desires, its looks, need to learn that there is more to life than the physical aspect. They need to learn that man does not live by bread alone. The Christian faith believes that both the "immortality of the soul" and "the resurrection of the body" are important. And therefore, we care for both!

Of course, as far as Christian doctrines go, the teaching of the resurrection of the body is the most mind stretching and faith demanding of all. Most of us have witnessed earthly remains of loved ones being lowered into the ground. And we ask, "How can such bodies be raised that have returned to dust? How can dust and ashes spread by wind and wave to the four corners of the earth possibly be reconstituted?" Answer? Our God is Almighty and by his word he can do it! He's already done it once! Not only did he create all there is by his powerful Word, He created us from the dust of the earth. More than that, He rose from the dead in the person of His Son who had already raised Lazarus and the son of the widow of Nain from the dead.

My fragile human flesh that I keep going with food and drink, exercise and medicine, until it is all worn out and dies, will also be raised from the dead! 1 Corinthians 15 speaks so eloquently of the resurrection of the body. Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit maintains that the dead are raised because Christ has been raised; they are raised by the resurrection power of Christ. In fact, Paul states it far stronger, "If we are not raised then Christ has not been raised either and our faith is in vain" (1 Cor 15:16ff). Paul then goes into quiet some detail using the analogy of a seed being buried and being raised to something glorious.

A single seed is planted in the ground and what comes out is vastly different. A plant with roots, stems, flower, and fruit rises. And each seed produces sizably different plants. The same thing will happen with the resurrection of the body. God will demonstrate His power by creating an astounding assortment of new bodies, all unique, different, but still "like Christ's glorious body." Paul gives us a bit of an idea in 1 Cor 15: 42-43 "...The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body."

Paul's point is that our resurrection body will be like Christ's glorious body. Now don't go all funny on me. This doesn't mean that we will all be blue eyed and have blond hair, or that we can appear and disappear at will or pass through walls and doors like Casper the ghost. What Paul is speaking about is that our resurrection body will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual. It will be imperishable for it will be a body no longer subject to death, disease, and decay; in other words, like Christ, we will live forever.

It will be glorious for it will reflect the splendour and majesty of God. It will be powerful for it will be filled with energy and vitality and endowed with abilities of which we have now no conception. It will be Spiritual for it will be totally led, guided, directed, and moulded by the Spirit and no longer under the sway of sin. In these ways our resurrection body will

be “like Christ's glorious body.” Again, what comfort, strength, and security this gives us. Yes, the body is lowered into the grave, but it does not remain there forever. Death is not the end of our body. Someday, it will be raised by the power of Christ, reunited with the soul, and made like Christ’s glorious body.

Finally, and this is where the rubber really hits the road, the resurrection is true for unbeliever and believer alike. The difference is where we will spend eternity! Thankfully Scripture hasn’t left us in the dark. We know if we embrace Christ as Saviour, eternal life in glory is ours. John 3:16, “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:36 “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.” John 5:24, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” John 6:40, “For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” Rom 8:1 “Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”

When your unbelieving friend hears you say that you believe in the resurrection of the dead and he asks you, “Where did you get that poppy-cock from” how will you respond? Hopefully, with a gracious, gentle and winsome manner. Perhaps you can invite them around for tea one night and pray that the Lord will give you words to speak and that your unbelieving friend may have a receptive heart to the Holy Spirit’s prompting and what you say.

After the invitation has been accepted, you could express the pain you feel when a dear friend or loved one dies. Although we know death has been defeated it is still a real enemy! And perhaps, Lord willing, if the opportunity presents itself, you can explain how the Creator God has given you the gift of faith to believe in Jesus Christ, His Son. Perhaps you can tell them that God’s Holy Spirit has caused you to believe what the Scriptures teach. Jesus rose from the dead and so shall we.

And then finally, pray that the Holy Spirit will convict your friend of his need for a Saviour that rose from the dead and has promised eternal life for all who believe. May our friends not enter eternity without being told this good news, for that would be extremely tragic. Amen.