

HE IS RISEN! (HE IS RISEN, INDEED! ALLELUIA!) Yes, we say that a lot during the Easter Season, that’s for sure. And they are fairly interesting words in light of the sermon title for today, wouldn’t you say? When a pastor is preaching on the theme, “Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?”, you would assume the answer to that is up in the air, at least for a moment or two. And yet, here we are, asserting with volume and vigor that Jesus IS risen! So what gives?

Well, first of all, let me tell you what I am not going to do. I am not going to answer that question as it pertains to Jesus. I mean, really, you and I wouldn’t even be here today if we were not convinced that Jesus died on a cross and then bodily rose from the dead three days later. The Bible is clear on this as we have witness after witness of His physical life after death - the women at the tomb, the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the disciples at Jesus’ fish fry on the beach, His large group gathering with 500 folks at one time, the 40 cumulative days Jesus spent with His disciples after His resurrection, and finally His bodily ascension back to His Father’s side. And the apostle Paul in the words of our Bible reading for today made it very clear: *“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead . . .”* Yeah, so . . . not going to spend any more time answering the fact or fiction question when it comes to Jesus’ resurrection. HE IS RISEN! (HE IS RISEN, INDEED! ALLELUIA!) See, you already know and believe that!

And, actually, even though it might not sound like it, for the most part, the Christians to whom the apostle Paul was writing back in the day also knew and believed that. At the same time, if you were to read a few verses prior to our reading for today in First Corinthians 15, you would see that there were some among them who were saying that there is no resurrection of the dead. Now they weren’t referring to Jesus’ resurrection with those thoughts; they knew and believed He bodily rose from the dead. They were referring to the resurrections of all those who believed in and followed Jesus; they were referring to their own resurrections.

It was pretty much the same struggle or confusion that we often have today. Yes, we believe that Jesus rose bodily from the dead. But, we’re not so sure about what happens to us or others who believe in and follow Jesus after we or they die. Most of you have been to a funeral or a memorial event or a celebration of life or a graveside service. The body is just a husk in a casket or ashes in an urn. And yet we comfort ourselves that our loved one is in a better place, and we leave it at that and go on our way. Now, it is true that the souls of those who believe in and follow Jesus are in a better place at the moment of death. But, if that is where we leave it, we are missing out on the fullness of God’s Good News for us in Jesus.

Let me say this very clearly: God is indeed interested in your soul, but He is just as interested in your physical body. As they are together now, so He wants them to be forever. Do you remember how God originally created human beings, prior to the curse of sin coming into the picture? Yeah . . . He created those human beings as physical entities into whom He breathed the life-giving breath of His Spirit. Soul and body together forever in God's eternal presence - that's how He designed it, and that's how He ultimately wants it to be again.

Which is why He sent His Son into the world! On Good Friday we once again absorbed the truth of all that Jesus did to pay for our sin through His death on the cross. Forgiven and reconciled by His sacrifice, we live new lives now looking forward to the day when all things are restored as they once were. And we can do that because of what we celebrate on this day, that CHRIST IS RISEN! (HE IS RISEN, INDEED! ALLELUIA!) Yes He is.

He IS risen. Not "He rose" or even "He has risen," while both of those are true. But Jesus, in His bodily resurrected state, IS risen, and continues to be risen. He is currently alive in His physical body in His Father's kingdom of glory, and will one day come again to pull with Him into that kingdom all who are baptized into His death and resurrection and continue to believe in and follow Him. As Jesus was resurrected bodily, so will we. He is what the apostle Paul calls the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" - the initial harvest of all of those who have died and then have been given new and forever physical lives. And since Jesus is the firstfruits, you can have complete confidence that there will be a whole lot more where He came from!

In Jesus, God redeemed you; He bought you back from the wages of your sin to give you new life. And in doing so, He didn't just redeem your soul, but all of you. The body that was created in His image is special to Him. In your baptism He touched your body with water and words to place His name upon you and claim you as His own. He delivered His Spirit to you, to live in your body so that your body can be a temple of His Holy Spirit. And today, through His Supper, Jesus enters into your body to deliver His forgiveness and love once again. Jesus wants you - all of you - with Him forever; soul and body reunited to live with Him in God's eternal physical kingdom of glory.

In just a few moments we will recite one of the ancient Christian Creeds known as the Nicene Creed. At the end of that Creed we will say these words: "I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." I hope you believe those words even more on this Easter Sunday, because, CHRIST IS RISEN! (HE IS RISEN, INDEED! ALLELUIA!) And so will you. Amen.