



Easter 2022 – April 16/17, 2022

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: **The Crown Jewel of Christianity: The Resurrection of the Body**

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 15: 19-26

19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. 20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Dear Christian Friends,

It's one of the most important truths of Christianity. It's just that, more than a few people I've talked to, well ... they just have it wrong. That important truth is this: what is it going to be for Christian believers after we die, when we're living with God in heaven? I mean, will we be spirits floating around on clouds strumming harps? Or will we be souls singing hymns in a church service that never ends? The answer to both of these questions is "no". Neither of these is correct. God's plan for our eternity is far less like what we see in on the Cartoon Network, and far more what we read in the book of Genesis in the perfect Garden of Eden.

Every week, here at St. Paul's, we confess this truth of Christianity. And we'll say it again today in the Apostle's Creed: ***I believe in the resurrection of the body.*** Sure, we say it, ... but does that mean we always believe it and completely understand it?

This Easter phrase: "I believe in the resurrection of the body" is God's greatest gift to us. Quite simply, it's the **Crown Jewel of Christianity**. And failing to recognize it's great value would be tragic indeed.

Here's what I mean. Back in 1905, a miner named Frederick Wells was walking underground in a mine shaft he supervised. As he walked the dark path, a bright flash caught his eye. A large, glassy chunk was wedged in the wall of the mine. Curious, he used his pocket knife to pry the glassy chunk from the wall. As he held it, his first thought was: "This is big. Too big to be real. It must be glass. But, what if ... what if it were real?" He was standing in a mine shaft of the Premier Diamond Mine in South Africa.

Frederick Wells took the huge stone, the size of your fist, to the surface. But, when he brought it to the office, the clerks there dismissed it, at first. They didn't believe that it could be real. They didn't think it was worth anything, just a worthless crystal. But, upon careful examination, they determined it was a diamond of dazzling clarity and

size. It was a 3106 carat diamond – the largest, by far, ever discovered. Ladies – how would you like to wear a diamond like that? Can you imagine if Frederick would've listened to those clerks and just threw away the world's largest diamond?

That would've been a big mistake and an epic fail. But, failing to understand the resurrection of the body would be a far greater mistake and epic fail. It would be an eternal disaster. Three days ago, on Good Friday, through the testimony of multiple eye-witnesses, we heard how Jesus, God's Son and our human brother bled and died on a cross and was buried in a rock tomb. Now, on Easter Sunday, we joyfully celebrate how He came back to life and walked out of the grave. That amazing event had ramifications that still makes all the difference for us.

Jesus' death and resurrection had a very specific purpose. Paul stated that purpose in the opening words of our sermon reading from the Great Resurrection Chapter of the Bible in 1 Corinthians, chapter 15. He said: ***For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*** Those first words hold all the tragedy of mankind living in this sinful world. At the same time, those first words hold all the triumph that's waiting for believers in the next world. Paul's point here is very simple. When our father Adam sinned against God by eating the forbidden fruit, his disobedience negatively affected not only him, but every one of his descendants and every bit of Creation. ***In Adam all die.*** That means when Adam brought sin into this world, it didn't come alone. It was accompanied by the penalty for sin which is death.

It's true – now we're born sinners. Ohh, THANKS Father Adam. Thanks a lot! But, let's not kid ourselves. We aren't just born sinful, we sin every day. Whatever stage of life we're in – when we fail as fathers or make the mistakes only mothers can make. When we aren't the kids or teens, God has called us to be. When we grow older, and instead of being Christian wells of wisdom or examples of patience, we carelessly let our hearts be jaded and filled with worry or pessimism. Sure, we shine up nice on Easter Saturday/Sunday. We may not let others see our brokenness, but there's no doubt about it – we are Father Adam's children.

And every hour we spend in this world, well, it brings us closer to the death we can run from but never escape. ***In Adam, we all die.*** We can't escape death and we can't do anything to make ourselves right with God.

And that's what makes this Easter Day and this God/man Jesus so special. The good news of Easter is that even though we are broken and sinful, God still loves us. He loved us so much that He set into motion a plan to rescue us from ourselves, from this broken world, and from death itself.

Jesus became one of us so that He could right everything Adam had wronged. He became one of us so that He could die in our place. And in dying, He could give us the

gift of life that never ends. Really, Jesus descended into the darkness but when He came back, He brought with Him a jewel, a Crown Jewel for us. That's because Christ Is Risen. He's Risen Indeed.

But, wait, there's more. ***For as in Adam all die, so in Christ, all will be made alive. But, each in His own turn; Christ, the first fruits, then when He comes, those who belong to Him.*** On that first Easter when Jesus rose from the dead, it was also a BIG day on the Jewish calendar. It was the Jewish festival of "First fruits." That was the day when God's people brought a special offering from their grain harvests. Every Godly Jew thanked God for the first part of their harvest, because they knew the rest of harvest would soon follow.

Do you see Paul's comparison here? The resurrection of Jesus is just the beginning. His resurrection guarantees ours. Not that we will be spirits floating aimlessly on a cloud or singing in a worship service that will never end. Oh no. It means even when we die, God WILL raise us back to life ... just like Jesus. Remember, when Jesus rose from the dead, His disciples could see him, laugh with him, and talk with Him. The resurrection of Jesus is just like the first fruits. It guarantees every Christian believer a resurrected body just like Jesus. Oh, and it's coming soon.

Just think what this means! We believe in the resurrection of the body. We know that Christian family member or friend who's died and we miss them beyond words. We don't just have to HOPE they're in a better place. Jesus promises more. That Christian loved one is perfect in heaven. And it means one day, because of Easter, their bodies will come back to life. Our loved ones will walk right up to us, talk with us, laugh with us and be with us forever. Because of Christ's resurrection, death is not the end for any Christian believer. Using a punctuation comparison, death for the Christian is not a period or an end. It's just a comma, signifying more is to come.

The huge diamond that Frederick Wells discovered in South Africa was named the Cullinan diamond after the mine's owner. And when it was transported back to England, there was a risk that someone would steal it. So special royal officials were sent to South Africa, and a steamship sailed under armed guard with the package kept in the captain's safe. But, that was all a decoy. The real diamond wasn't even on the ship. While world's attention was on that steamship, the real diamond made it's way back to England in a most basic way. It was sent in the mail. Oh, that's right, the largest diamond ever discovered was put in a plain box and shipped parcel post. Hmm, I wonder, how many people moved that box, without realizing it's great treasure?

My point – sometimes the best things in life come in simple packages. The best gift from God, eternal life, comes to us in the simplest of phrases: *I believe in the resurrection of the body*. Don't say that phrase like you're simply going through motions. And don't underestimate it's great value either. It's not just another one of

those I-am-sure-everything-is-going-to-be-okay phrases people use when they really aren't sure and it's probably not going to be okay. This phrase packs power because Jesus really did rise from the dead. This phrase isn't empty because Jesus' tomb is!

The Cullinan Diamond was eventually cut into 99 smaller diamonds, which are not part of the British Crown Jewels. It's value is estimated at more than two billion dollars. Do you know how much the British had to pay for those jewels? Nothing. They were a free gift.

But, we have a far better gift, all because of Easter. Jesus died and rose again as the first-fruits of the resurrection. And here is the Crown Jewel of Christianity: Jesus promises, one day, He will bring us back to life all those who die in faith. Best of all: it won't cost a thing but given only by those who believe Christ's Words.

When miner Frederick Wells found this huge jewel, he asked himself: "What if?" Paul does the same thing for us today. What if? Paul said: ***If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.*** If all we have is Jesus in this short life, we have very little. If all we have this Easter is singing some nice songs, eating a good breakfast, and dressing up in our Easter best, we don't have very much. But, ... in a glorious pivot from despair to hope, Paul said: ***but Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. The first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*** Easter means each believer goes home with something valuable today. *I believe in the resurrection of the body* – the crown jewel of Christianity. And the only thing that anyone can say to that is amen. So, Amen! Please rise.