

Sermon February 20th, 2022

OT Genesis 45: 3-11, 15

NT 1 Corinthians 15: 35-38, 42-50

Gospel Luke 6: 27-38



One of the difficulties people have with the Bible is that it doesn't always answer the questions we have and, sometimes, when it does, the answers aren't always easy to understand or to agree on.

The Corinthians wanted to know, if we are resurrected, what will that body be like? Do you get a brand-new shiny body looking all fresh and healthy and possibly not that recognisable as the one you died with or is the old, possibly worn body resuscitated in some way? Do I look like I did when I was young and fit or older and mature or older still and frail?

The story of Jesus resurrected body showed someone who wasn't necessarily recognised straight away, remember the road to Emmaus meeting or Mary in the garden, and could do some different things like appearing in a locked room without having to open the door and disappearing again to appear somewhere else, such as the beach cooking breakfast. A bit ghost-like perhaps? But Thomas is asked to put his hand into the wound on his side and he eats with the disciples.

The truth is we don't know exactly what it will be like, something we find uncomfortable. Paul tries to explain.

He tries three different ways of approaching it.

The first is the comparison to a seed. A seed looks nothing like the final plant that it will grow into and first needs to be buried in the ground and watered before it will grow. The seed is necessary to get the final plant and so our current bodies are necessary to get our final resurrected body.

All the information to make the final plant is there in the seed and in our bodies, physical as they are but infused with the Holy Spirit through our belief in Jesus, we have all we need for our future bodies. We do not need to do anything else. God, the source of all life, has already prepared it for us.

The next way is to consider all the different forms of life in the world, plant and animal, insects, fish, birds, sheep, goats, human. Each has a body fitted for the way of life that it will lead. A fish has fins, a bird has wings, sheep have wool.

The third way of looking at it is that each creature changes and grows throughout its life. A new-born baby doesn't look much like the adult it will grow to be. It will grow in size and the relative size of parts of the body change. My mother told me that I was borne with curly ginger hair. She was quite upset that it fell out and blonde hair grew (I was less upset- sorry gingers).

We don't know exactly what our resurrected body will look like but it will be different because its purpose is different.

Our present body is corruptible, i.e., it can decay and break down, eventually dying. Our new body will be incorruptible.

Our present body is weak and limited in what it can do but our new body will be powerful.

Our present body is natural, designed for this world as it is at present, but our new body will be spiritual designed for this world as it will become at Jesus return. Note: this world, not some far off perfect heaven. Romans 8 speaks of this world groaning in its birth pangs as this new world is born.

At present we are not suitable for the new Kingdom of God and need to be reborn into our new form to be perfect in worship, service and love.

Even if we are alive and haven't died at the time Jesus second coming, we will still need to have a new body. It is a little like a new-born chick with its fluffy down. The new-born chick needs to grow feathers and develop muscles to be able to one day fly like an eagle.

Another way of looking at it is the source of power.

In the past few days, there has been an announcement about using fusion for energy. Nuclear physicists were very excited that they could produce power through fusion even though it was only for a few seconds. Fusion is the Holy Grail of energy production and is how the sun produces energy.

Nuclear physics can produce energy through fission, which involves splitting atoms, such as uranium, into smaller pieces. Uranium naturally breaks down slowly – i.e., it is radioactive but in a nuclear reactor this can be speeded up. The energy that was holding the original atom together is released and can be used as a source of power. Unfortunately, uranium isn't that plentiful, and the resulting atoms are very dangerous. They will break down but only over a very long time and the radiation that they produce over that time needs to be contained.

Fusion is different. You take hydrogen atoms, which are very plentiful and very reactive (think of the Hindenburg airship exploding) and squash them together to form helium which is very stable. The energy necessary to hold the helium atom together is much less than that of the original 2 hydrogen atoms and is available for us to use. Hydrogen is plentiful, once you get it going it takes a great deal of power initially) it produces very clean energy and no radiation.

Sounds great in theory but in practice we haven't managed to do it except for very short times.

If we could do it, we would not need coal, oil, nuclear fission reactors, etc. We would have clean and plentiful energy.

The resurrected body is a little like fusion energy. The source is different. Our current bodies are natural and fit our present world. Our future, resurrected bodies are spiritual and will fit the new-born world.

Just as the first Adam and his heirs are necessary until Jesus comes and shows us a further new way. As we read of his resurrected body it is not totally different, after the initial shock Mary and the disciples recognise him as Jesus but it is different as well, ready for a new, and at present, future life.

Jesus was born into a natural body like ours but on his death, he resurrected into a new development of that body that looked similar but runs in a different way.

So, what does that mean for us here and now? Do we just wait comfortably in the knowledge that all be well in the future?

Actually no, not quite. We have chosen to follow and accept Jesus Christ and so we have been born again into a new life. Baptism, particularly full immersion, has us going through the waters and rising again washed and new.

The second coming, in a sense has already begun for each one of us. It is not totally future. Jesus came in his resurrected body and from then on, the pathway was set, and our steps are already on it.

In the Gospel, Luke makes it clear that our lifestyle and behaviour is to be different. We are to be loving, not just to those we know and care about, but also to those we dislike, who threaten us, and we find uncomfortable to be with. You may think of a group that at present qualifies.

Most religions have a version of what we call the golden rule. Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you.

Christianity has it here in Luke 6, but it is different. It is more than just not harming or hurting them. It is reversed from the negative to the positive. We don't just abstain from actions we are to go out of our way to do good to those people.

This comes just after the Lukan version of the Beatitudes. Blessed are you who are poor, hungry, when people hate you but woe to you who are rich, who are full, who are laughing, when people speak well of you. It reverses what the world thinks of as good.

Then comes our reading for today. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.... Do to others as you would have them do to you."

Luke points out that even the worst of people do good to those they care about so why should you be proud of that? But to do good to those who hate you -hate a very strong word, not just a minor disagreement, curse you, abuse you- then you will receive a reward.

The Kingdom of God is not somewhere in the future. It is breaking in today, yesterday, tomorrow, from when Jesus came, and his resurrection shows this.

We are not to judge or condemn. That is for God. God is merciful, for which I am very grateful, and he forgives me and so I should forgive others. This isn't quite the same as ignoring what has happened. Things done have consequences and they do not disappear because someone is forgiven. But forgiveness gives a place to move forward into the future, to put right what can be and to come to terms with that which can't be put right.

Unforgiveness is destructive for us, for me. My forgiveness may not be accepted but it allows me to move on with my life. If the person who has hated or cursed or abused me accepts it then they too have a chance to move on as well.

For me the result is a good measure, pressed down, shaken together running over, placed in my lap. In the time of Jesus people would wear a long outer garment (the cloak that is spoken of earlier in the reading) that reached to the ground. It was held together by a belt or girdle at the waist and part would hang down over the belt forming a large pocket that could be used to carry

materials like wheat. This is the place where this generous, almost overflowing bounty is. It is not a scant dusting of good things, it is pressed down, shaken together, no air pockets or disappointment, it is heavy and abundant.

The Kingdom of God is not a holiday resort with servants at your every call. It is breaking into our world as it is today and shows us a little of what our world will become but we have to begin to behave as we will in the new world, the world of the Kingdom, of when Jesus comes again, we have to behave like that now.

No one misses out unless they reject it. It there offered by God to everyone. There is no sin or misbehaviour that can put someone outside of God's love if we will only respond and for each one of us who know Jesus and his love for us we are called to show that love to others, whether we like them or not, whether they are kind to us or not, whether they treat us as we would want to be treated. We are to love them just as Jesus did on the cross for each and every one of us and for all other people.