

Sermon Text for January 25, 2015

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Ezekiel 37:1-10, I Corinthians 15:35-44, 53-55

“The resurrection of the body”

We are winding down our Apostles’ Creed sermon series. I’ve already mapped out our next series which will start on February 22, and we will be looking at Genesis. You can look forward to Brett preaching on February 15 and then we transition into lent and Genesis. It is the start of a new year, the session came back with new goals and new ideas. There is an excitement that points to a rebirth of possibilities here at First Presbyterian. At the Bronkema household we are back to the new normal with only two girls at home, with our oldest in college. It’s been different. Each girl has their own personality.

I’ll never forget when they were little Bethany was known for bugging the other girls, especially Naomi. One time Naomi was playing in her room and Bethany was bothering her, Naomi kept calling for help, and Stacy was going over to rescue Naomi from Bethany when there was silence. Stacy could hear Naomi playing again so she figured they had worked it out. Time passed and Stacy thought she heard a little voice calling out softly and tenderly, mommy, mommy. She went into Naomi’s room and asked, were you calling me? No! She heard the voice again and she looked over to Naomi’s closet and saw that the door was closed and there was a chair propped against the door handle. Stacy opened the door and there was Bethany, in the closet playing by herself in the dark. Now Bethany has become more sophisticated in her bugging the girls, by, for example, posting Naomi’s driving skills online for the whole world to see. I think she got close to 100 likes on this picture.

There are certain things in our lives that we wish we could figuratively push into the closet push a chair against the door handle and forget about forever. We would love to be able to ignore certain issues and topics that make us feel uncomfortable and uneasy.

Today, we are looking at the phrase in the Apostles’ Creed: I believe in the resurrection... of the body. This is probably a topic that we want to shove into the proverbial closet and not deal with. As Christians we have no problem believing in the resurrection. We can say that our souls will rise to Christ when we die. But that’s not what we say on Sunday mornings. We say that we believe in the resurrection of the

body. What a horror if this broken, out of shape, ugly body were to be presented to Christ. And what about those who have been cremated? We are going to make sense of our belief and discover that this belief in the resurrection of the body is crucial to the understanding of God's creativity and power in our lives now.

Both of our Scriptures address the resurrection of the body. Ezekiel seems to address it in a way that it is our same bodies which rise up. Some of you may remember this commercial, it is terrible quality, but the only thing that can truly get us up and out of bed is a good cup of coffee. Or what about the fainting goats, so is this what we are talking about when we try to understand the resurrection of the body? What do we believe when we say that we believe in the resurrection of the body? Is it our same bodies, as our old bones like we hear in Ezekiel that get life breathed into them?

Calvin himself stated that "it is difficult to believe that bodies in all their rotteness will rise up." How important is it for us to actually believe that our physical bodies will rise again up in the resurrection? Isn't it enough just to believe in the resurrection in general? Paul says no and in Philippians 3:21 he tells us "He will transform our humble bodies that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself."

We are not the first to wonder at the physical resurrection of the body. The church in Corinth asked similar questions. They had a problem believing in the physical resurrection of our bodies. Paul had to set them straight in the Scripture that we read today. The question that Paul is answering here comes from vs. 35 "what kind of bodies are we going to have"? He uses the example of a seed to teach us that when you plant a seed you have no idea what type of details that plant will have. You know the type of plant, but you don't know exactly what it will look like because all plants are different. But a plant will grow from the decayed and the dead seed. The plant also will look nothing like the seed that was planted. So, our bodies will look nothing like the bodies we have now, which are merely the seeds for that which is to come.

Likewise, even our bodies as bad as they may be will rise up in a new, life-filled, perfect, immortal state. All we have to do is look at the resurrection of Christ as proof for that. Is there any person whose body was mutilated and abused more than His? His head was pierced, as well as his side and hands and feet. His back was mutilated by the whippings. But when he bodily arose he walked with two disciples on the road to

Emmaus and they didn't know what he had been through. Mary thought she had seen the gardener at the tomb.

The answer to the question do we believe in the bodily resurrection is yes. Christ's resurrection gives us an example that our bodies now badly beset by disease, death, or even cremation, will be given a new form and a glorious perfect shape. We read in Matthew 27 that when Jesus died the tombs opened and any bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection these bodies came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many.

But it is not just a New Testament understanding of the resurrection of the body. In Isaiah 26:19 we read: "Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead." Our first Scripture reading also gives us an insight into God's literal raising from the dead the bones, the bodies, the ashes of those long dead and placing his Holy Spirit within them. The story of Ezekiel is one used often to describe the resurrection of the dead, but when it is paired with the Corinthian Scripture we see a glorious promise that many of us long to hear and see.

There is a sequence of pictures that is going a bit viral on the internet, and it is a following of a spouse during her battle with cancer, which you will see, she eventually lost.

We need to be certain that our bodies are loved by God and redeemed by God as well. We need to believe that God's plan includes a plan for the resurrection of our bodies, but not that this plan would then translated into the emaciated feeble bodies that we have as we near death. There is a large part of our society that does not like their bodies for a whole variety of reasons, so the promise that we will be raised with our bodies sounds more like a threat. Paul tells us something different. You don't have to be dying of cancer to be unhappy and so much of what culture tells us focuses on our bodies. But Scripture promises us that we are getting a brand new, glorified, perfect, spiritual and physical body. Yes, we will receive as Paul states heavenly bodies that are different from our earthly bodies.

As Christians we are called to believe in the resurrection of the body not just for the future body that we will receive but the current body that we have. We are not ascetics who believe that you are no earthly good. But rather our belief in the

resurrection of the body allows us to understand even more fully that we are made in the image of God, that the body we have is God's temple and that temple needs to be respected, and loved, and valued as part of God's creation.

The valuing of that which God has given us, be it our bodies or what we have materially, is part of what it means to respect the place that you have been given in this world. Our goal is not to respect our bodies for our own sake, but rather so that it can be used more effectively for God's service. Our goal is not to respect our material goods so that our main emphasis is to accumulate as much as we can just to have more, but rather so that these goods can be used more effectively for God's service.

Today we are allowed to hear that we believe in the resurrection of the body because God's word tells us so. This means that our bodies here on earth need to be loved as a creation of God's holy hands. But when the world around us gives us message after message that the body is disposable and that there are more from where they came from, it is hard to hear and believe Paul's words.

But believe them we must, we will be given new bodies, which ought to give us new hope and promise for the present, as well as the future. Amen.