



From the Desk of Pastor Meyer

In the Apostle's Creed, we confess that "...I believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen." Do you stop and think what these words mean? Do you connect these words with Easter?

In the German, the Large Catechism says, "We believe in the resurrection of the corpse." More graphic, isn't it? The Old English had "resurrection of the flesh" till Henry the VIII changed it in 1543 to "body." This is one of the most holy, profound things we say. If you notice the hymnal has a small cross (†) in the text, encouraging you to sign yourself with the cross. You were first signed with the cross when you were reborn from the dead at Baptism; you'll be signed with it for the last time at your death before burial.

See the symmetry? What happens at the beginning of your spiritual life in your baptism when you died and rose with Christ also happens at the ending of your physical life, and all along you're reminded of this by the Divine Service where you confess, "I believe in the resurrection of the body (†)."

We do believe this, but it will not happen till the Last Day. (There were a handful in the Scriptures who have already experienced resurrection – for example, those in the Passion Reading whose tombs were opened by the death of Christ – but they died, again, later. They are waiting a second, eternal resurrection.) All the dead, even those in Christ, are where they were buried. You sometimes hear a well-intended Christian, when passing by a cemetery, say, "My loved one is not there." O yes, he was and is. The body is at rest in the grave. Our word *cemetery* says as much. It's a Christian word. It comes from a Greek word meaning "sleeping-place." It was used exclusively by Christians for their burial grounds. If your loved one is in the next room sleeping, he or she is still there. The bodies of our dead in Christ are sleeping in their graves while their souls are with Him in heaven.

Their bodies sleep there till the Last Day when the Lord will descend with a shout, with the trumpet of the Archangel, and raise them. We mark their graves because neither God nor we are finished with their bodies. Graves are future sites of resurrection. All casket and vault warranties will be voided! Traditionally, caskets are laid out with feet to the east, that so when the resurrected body sits up it's facing the east, the direction from which Scripture tells us our Lord will return "on the Last Day." Though once we die, our souls are safe and at peace in heaven, we're still not whole, complete, satisfied till that Last Day. Revelation shows the souls under the altar of God in heaven crying out, "How long?" We long for the day when these aging, decaying, aching bodies will be raised.

"On the last day Christ will raise me and all the dead." This means everyone who has ever died will be raised, even those who died in horrific ways. Revelation conveys this by saying that on the Last Day "the sea gave up the dead that were in it." To the ancients who never dipped much below the surface of the sea, lost at sea was the most complete way to die. Today, we might include other tragic events. But even these whose remains may never be found, the Lord will raise whole and complete. If humans today can match cells no matter where they are found by DNA, wonder not that God can call those cells back together no matter where they have been scattered.

(As a side note, some people ask about cremation. While the Christian tradition is for burial, I see no Biblical mandate prohibiting cremation. If you wish to be cremated for cost reasons, do it, but resist the idea to have your ashes scattered, because even in death, we seek to care for the gift of the body. (While the Lord might be able to find scattered ashes, your loved one's can't, and as Herman Melville laments at the opening of Moby Dick it's truly desolate to have no certain place to mourn your loss.)

We believe in the resurrection of the body, not the disposal of the body, because the body has been sanctified by Christ's body. The Father prepared a body for Him in the Virgin's womb, so in His Body He might keep all of God's Laws. Jesus did the Law perfectly in His body. He didn't give into the weakness, the tiredness, the temptations that afflict this body and so sin. He never had to say to someone, "I'm sorry I snapped at you; I'm just tired." He never had to say, "I have no strength to help you with that." He never said, "The Devil made me do it" because though the Devil tried he failed.

So why is Jesus hanging naked on a cross between two criminals? How come the holy, sinless body of Jesus is ridiculed by soldiers, by church leaders, by passersby, and even by criminals? Why are the lips of Jesus that only gave kisses, the mouth of Jesus that never said an ill word, and the tongue of Jesus that only praised and never cursed God cracked, parched, bleeding, and beaten? Why does God the Father turn away from the dying body of His Son?

"For us men and for our salvation," we say in the Nicene Creed. It's as if the Creed says, "Look, behold, worship, receive what the body of Jesus went through to save you, to rescue you from sin, from death and from the power of the Devil." His body was so disfigured by torture and abuse that His face didn't even look human, so that God might lift up your face and say, "My daughter; My son." Each blow, each wound, each pain His Body endured on earth earned you a perfect body for eternity. By the stripes His body endured yours has been healed. We believe in the God who raises bodies, these bodies, my body.

You hear a lot about body image, and how women in particular are bothered by theirs. I don't know if that's true, but I do know it's ultimately, eternally irrelevant. On the Last Day when these bodies rejoin their souls and rise to greet their Lord, you will not hear one Christian express disappointment over his or her body. Because as Paul promises in Philippians 3, "Jesus will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like His own." Raised out of the very dust we were created from, without a doubt, we will praise the Lord in these bodies for creating them, for redeeming them, for sanctifying them.

"I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come (†)."

Before I close, I want to point out that I have included for historical record my announcements about receiving and declining the Call to Trinity, Amarillo. Don't be alarmed; there is not another Call.

Also, as a personal note, I want to thank you all, especially the ladies, who hosted the bridal shower for our daughter, Alyssa. We were all overwhelmed at the loving support for her and her fiancée, Nick. If you didn't have the chance to meet him at Christmas, hopefully you will the next time they come to visit – whenever that might be.

Finally, make note of the worship opportunities in March: Wednesday Lenten services continue almost all month, culminating with the Holy Week services of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and, of course, Easter. For future planning, when we get into April, my plan is to continue using the Wednesday 7pm time slot with beginning an evening adult Bible study, topic to be determined.

Happy Easter!

Pastor Meyer