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 Sixth Sunday Lent

***The Apostle's Creed:  
 I Believe in....the Resurrection of the Body, and the Life Everlasting  
 John 11:24-27, John 14:1-7  
 Rev 21:1-5***

**Revelation 21:1-5**

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.*

*2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

*3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them;*

*4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."*

*5 And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

This week is the end of our ***Apostle's Creed*** sermon series.

Today we look at the final phrase:

***I believe in....the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.***

It's ***no coincidence*** that the Creed ends with these words.

We often hear Revelation 21 at a funeral,

because of it's images of heaven and life after death.

The creed ends this way because

***Death is not the final word*** in our faith—the final word is ***Life***.

It is the ***resurrection*** of our bodies.

It is the ***life everlasting***—heaven—eternal life with God.

People have placed their hope in the resurrection  
 for ***hundreds of thousands of years***.

I was fascinated reading Adam Hamilton's book *Creed*,  
 about the history of burials and the belief in the resurrection.

Did you know that some of the ***oldest intentional human burials*** were discovered in the Holy Land?

They date back somewhere between 80-100,000 years ago!

Some of these burial sites had pigment writings, jewelry, even tools—  
 telling us that they believed in life after death!

Adam Hamilton. *Creed* (Abingdon: Nashville, 2016). pg. 147.

We also know about Egypt's ***Valley of the Kings***,  
 where almost all of the kings, the pharaohs,

were buried in very elaborate tombs, from about 1539-1057 B.C. These tombs contained dozens of different chambers, and a burial chamber where a stone sarcophagus would contain the royal mummy.

The tomb might have rooms of furniture and equipment for use in the next life.

The walls were often covered with painted or sculpted scenes depicting the dead king, the gods of the underworld, and stories to help him through his next life.

Belief in the resurrection was very important for the Egyptians!

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Valley-of-the-Kings>

Some say that ***Stonehenge in England***, constructed somewhere between 3000 and 2000 B.C, is also an important marker for the next life, because of all the burial sites that have been discovered all around it. Adam Hamilton. *Creed* (Abingdon: Nashville, 2016). pg. 148.

***Death is THE shared experience of humanity.***

We all have to bury people we love,  
And we all face death ourselves.

It's no wonder that people have ***questioned*** what happens after death.

***What happens*** to our bodies? Our souls?

Where do we go,  
and what happens when Jesus comes again to judge and redeem,  
and to make a new heaven and earth, as we heard in Revelation 21?

The ***ancient Hebrew people*** had some ideas about this. For them, death was a realm known as ***Sheol***.

***We think that ancient Israel*** didn't necessarily believe in a personal resurrection like we do today— that idea ***grew and evolved*** over time, especially around the time of the Babylonian ***exile*** in 598 and 587 B.C. In the intertestamental time frame (between the Old and New Testaments) the idea was more prominent, and began to take new shape.

Adam Hamilton. *Creed* (Abingdon: Nashville, 2016). pg. 148-9.

Remember ***Jesus' story*** about the Lazarus in Paradise, and the rich man in Gehenna?

Remember Jesus saying "*today you will be with me in paradise*" to the thief hanging beside him?

The idea of ***resurrection has evolved*** for God's people over time.

In biblical times many believed that after death, people either lived in Gehenna (for the unrighteous) or Paradise (for the righteous), awaiting the final judgment when Christ would come again, and then all bodies would be finally resurrected, and people would live in heaven, or hell.

Adam Hamilton. *Creed* (Abingdon: Nashville, 2016). pg. 148-50.

But there is ***not actually a 'road map'*** for eternal life, written out clearly in the scriptures! Instead it's pieced together from writings and stories throughout the Bible.

So what do ***Christians today believe*** about the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting?

Well, we certainly believe in the ***resurrection of the body***. That means we believe in a whole, new, perfect human body, that lives eternally with God.

Think about ***Jesus' resurrected body***—appearing to so many followers and disciples, and even to more than 500 people at once according to 1 Corinthians 15:6.

Every single time Jesus appears in human form, but with the scars on his body. He is ***Jesus in bodily form***, and yet they ***don't recognize*** him at first, so something must have been ***different*** about his resurrected self. Exactly what is a ***mystery***.

Paul says throughout his letters, but especially in ***1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4*** that we believe in the resurrection of the body because that's what we ***see in Jesus***, and that's what ***he promised*** for our eternal life. Our resurrection is based upon his!

Does this mean we get a ***new body just like the one*** we have now? And does there have to be ***an actual body*** to be resurrected? What about bodies that have completely ***disintegrated*** in their graves over time, or the ***ashes*** of people who are cremated, or bodies of people who are ***missing***, and loved ones had to bury an empty casket?

It seems from scripture that ***God is not dependent***

upon having our actual body at the time of death to bring resurrection.  
To me, that makes sense, right?  
This is God we're talking about!

If Jesus is our clue to understanding it,  
we will **still be ourselves** (remember his scars?),  
we will **know** one another, but we will be made **new**.  
Exactly what that looks like, I don't know,  
but it's **different than just being souls** floating around in space.  
We believe in the resurrection of the **body**.

How and when is an **incredible mystery**.  
I can think of **more questions** than answers...  
Like, if we are resurrected immediately upon our death,  
and we go to be with God—what happens when Christ comes again?  
How does that change our resurrection or eternal life?  
Friends, I just **don't know**.  
I'm not sure that any of us can know it all.

And yet, **entire denominations and religious sects**  
have built their theology around the second coming of Christ,  
even though Jesus Himself told us the specifics of that are unknown.  
**Seventh-Day Adventists** began with a man  
who believed Jesus would return in 1843 or 1844.  
**Jehovah's Witnesses** started with a man who believed Jesus would return and begin his  
kingdom in 1914.  
And of course **many different pastors and writers**  
have suggested **dates** for the end of the world,  
or the second coming...and still here we are.

When the Apostle's Creed says that Jesus will come again  
to judge the quick and the dead,  
we **don't believe we know** the day He's coming.  
Instead we affirm that **He IS coming** back to for Judgment,  
and so we should always be **ready**.  
No need to spend a lot of time and energy guessing when it's going to happen, instead we  
should be challenged to be ready to meet him—  
at our death or in the second coming.  
And we **get "ready"** by making sure our faith and trust  
is in Him each and every day!

There's so much we don't know,  
but there's also a **lot of promises we DO have**.  
Listen to these beautiful promises that are in our Bible:  
In **John 14**, Jesus says

*In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?*

**3** *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.*

**4** *And you know the way to the place where I am going."*

In **John 14:19** Jesus says, *because I live, you also will live.*

In **John 11:25** Jesus says, *I am the resurrection and the life, those who believe in me, though they die, yet shall they live.*

**2 Corinthians 5:1** says: *For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

I don't understand how heaven and Christ's return all work out, but we hear this in **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**:

*For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.*

I think it's safe to say that we will be **resurrected**, and we will have **life, forever with God.**

We believe **He is coming back**

(remember the Creed: to judge the quick and the dead),

and we also believe that Jesus will **make all things new**, promised to us by Jesus, and in the book of Revelation.

Which brings us to the very end of the Creed, **the life everlasting.**

We believe in the life everlasting, aka heaven.

**But what is heaven? What is it like?**

Well, again—it's ultimately a **mystery.**

All we have are some **ideas**, some analogies,

some stories of people who believe they went to heaven and came back to life.

I wonder if some things are **just too wonderful**

for the human mind to comprehend, you know?

We do hear in scripture that there are **places prepared** for us in heaven.

We do hear have Jesus talking about the kingdom of heaven being like a great **banquet.**

We have the book of Revelation talking about a **wedding celebration.**

I think that heaven might be a **great big party!**

What do you think?

And all we have to **compare it to** is celebrations here on earth.

Somehow I think that pales in comparison

to what is waiting for us on the other side, don't you?

But can you think right now,  
 about the ***most joyous celebrations*** you've experienced?  
 ...and those memories give us just a taste  
 of the celebration awaiting us in heaven!

I remember almost four years ago ***getting married to Ed***,  
 kind of on the sly because we didn't really tell people...  
 instead we went to Woodward park, on a Tuesday morning at 10am.  
 It was just the pastor, my sister and I,  
 Ed and his firefighter buddy Justin,  
 and a coworker of Ed's who took pictures.  
 It was glorious—a beautiful day (windy of course, it is Oklahoma),  
 and it seemed like we sailed through the ceremony,  
 smiled so much for pics that our faces were sore,  
 and then we went and joined my family for a great big breakfast  
 at the Wild Fork.  
 Food had never tasted so good!

Which makes me think that heaven must involve  
 some ***wonderful food and drink***.  
 So many celebrations happen around a table, right?  
 With a great feast!  
 Think of Jesus turning all that water into wonderful wine for a wedding,  
 think of a wedding banquet,  
 think of feasting on the finest foods.  
 What if that's just a glimpse of the heavenly banquet?

Adam Hamilton's wisely says this:  
***What you believe about death changes how you face life.***  
 Adam Hamilton. *Creed* (Abingdon: Nashville, 2016). pg. 164.  
 I think this is so true.  
 What we believe about where we are going next—  
 Really helps us make it through the time we have left, don't you think?  
 Don't our beliefs about heaven ***help us here*** on earth?  
 I think they give us real, meaningful ***hope***!  
 A solid foundation in ***faith***.

When we hear the ***promises of eternal life at a funeral***,  
 we are not just listening to some happy thoughts.  
 We are not just being optimistic,  
 when we talk about heaven for our loved ones who have died,

We are talking about ***reality*** for us—***the resurrection and life everlasting***.  
 We are talking about a ***completely new life*** after death—

a life without pain, sorrow, or suffering.

That is **powerful**.

That is our hope in the middle of a suffering world,  
where death is all around us.

I honestly **don't know how** people survive without this hope!

This weekend I attended the viewing and memorial for a young man  
who spent some of his middle school years in this church.

Some of you may remember **Connie Lutton** and her three beautiful adopted sons. The  
middle son Jacob was tragically killed this past week,  
He was only 18 years old.

There are **no real words of comfort** for such a tragedy.

It doesn't make any sense to see a young man lying in a casket,  
someone who had his whole life ahead of him.

How can you comfort a parent who's having to bury a child?

So many of you have been through that horror.

So where can we turn in such awful circumstances?

I believe the best place to turn is to our **Savior Jesus Christ**,  
and the fact that **his resurrection means we have one too**.

I believe our only solid hope is found in these final words of our Creed:

**the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.**

I believe we place our faith in what will be a whole new body,  
and an eternal life without pain, sorrow, or suffering.

**What we believe really does matter.**

What we believe about **eternal life** affects the way we **live** our lives today.

For me, it makes all the difference.

Death is not the final word,

the **end is new life, and resurrection!**

Today we remember the life that is to come,  
as we **gather at the Lord's Table**.

As we come forward to eat,  
we celebrate the **gift of Jesus own body and blood**,  
given to nourish our hearts and lives.

As we gather at this **holy banquet**,

We experience a **foretaste** of the heavenly banquet that awaits us.

That is our **Good News** of the Gospel today.

May we all see death through the lens of **resurrection**,  
And see our lives through the lens of **life everlasting**.

*God will wipe every tear from their eyes.*

*Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."*  
*5 And the one on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."*  
Amen.