

A Divine Preview

7th Sun. after Epiphany – 02/23/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: I Cor. 15:21-26, 30-42 Pastor Keith Besel

vv.22-23a [Paul says, literally from the Greek,] **“For just as in Adam all continually die, so also in Christ all will be restored to life. But each in his order...”**

Introduction

⊗ There’s one topic that Christians of all “flavors” and even non-Christians are always interested in; a topic that brings up so many different ideas and predictions. It is the end of the world; also known as the “End Times.”

➔ Countless books, movies and TV specials have attempted to answer the questions and concerns that arise around this topic. Frankly, it is why we are studying the book of Revelation right now in our Sunday morning Bible Study; because people are looking for answers about the future; more specifically their future.

⊗ While it is impossible for us to unravel all the mysteries about the end of the world here this morning, our Epistle Reading from 1 Corinthians 15 gives us a bit of a “sneak preview” of what the resurrection of the dead will be like.

➔ While I tend to get a little annoyed at them, Mary Beth, on the rare occasions that we actually go to a theater to watch a movie, especially loves watching the previews. So, what is their purpose? to give a brief, yet compelling description of what is coming up – without giving it all away; what we can expect to see in the future when the movie actually comes out.

I. Questions about the Last Day / Final Resurrection

⊗ As we turn to that great “Resurrection Chapter” in 1 Corinthians 15 this morning, Paul tells us about the Last Day. He doesn’t give it all away, but like a sneak preview, he tells us what we need to know.

➔ The city of Corinth was a lot like any city in America today. There were lots of people that had questions about the Last Day. Some questioned whether or not it was even possible for the dead to be raised. Others thought the resurrection would only be “spiritual” while our bodies would stay in the ground. And some, like the hypothetical inquirer in verse 35, wondered what kind of bodies we would have when Christ returns. He asks, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?”

⊗ So Paul addresses these questions with the use of an analogy. He wants us to think about seeds. In the text he uses the example of wheat, but being in this part of the country, we could just as easily think about pine trees. As we did in the children’s sermon, imagine whichever pine is your favorite – blue spruce, ponderosa, cedar or something else. When we get up into the forest and walk through the woods, these trees dwarf us. They are tall and noble; both intimidating and magnificent at the same time. It’s amazing to think that each majestic pine tree came from only one little seed inside a pinecone.

➔ We all know how it works – take a small seed, bury it in the ground, and according to God’s time and life-giving power it becomes a majestic, glorious tree. To put one of those little seeds next to a mature tree is no comparison. In fact it’s hard to imagine that something so magnificent and beautiful can come from something so small and insignificant. Paul’s analogy says that just as the tree is more glorious than the seed, so will our resurrected bodies be; so much more glorious than the bodies we have right now.

II. “Just as in Adam all continually die”

- ✘ The early verses in our Epistle Reading – verses 21-26 are packed by Paul with what some people think of as confusing, maybe even contradictory statements. There's death and dying right next to resurrection and being made alive. There's talk of Christ as the "firstfruits" from the dead and Him delivering the kingdom to the Father after destroying every rule and authority and power on this earth.
 - ➔ It's enough for some people to throw up their hands and just say, "It's too much; too hard to understand."
- ✘ And those words at the beginning of verse 21 and especially at the beginning of verse 22, if we take them by themselves, it's as if Paul is just pulling the rug out from under us; stating the ugly truth that we can't avoid; that we see around us every day.
 - ➔ In the original Greek the verb at the start of verse 22 describes the continuous, ongoing action of the Greek present tense, "...all continually die." That is, every day throughout our time here on earth, we are seeing people die. No one is exempt from this ugly truth about the sinful nature that we "all" have inherited from Adam as human beings. Because we all sin – and no one is exempt from that, we all continue to die, day after day, year after year.
 - ➔ Listen to how Romans 3:10-12 emphasizes that no one escapes this truth: "as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.'" And then just a few verses later in Romans 3:23 Paul continues, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
- ✘ Okay, if we're honest with ourselves, we have to admit that this really is no big surprise. Over and over again, we all prove by our thoughts and actions that we do not deserve any part of God's glorious kingdom.
 - ➔ Oh sure, we might be able to convince some people that we actually do honor God above everything else, and we are able to fool a few folks into thinking that we live the life that Christ has commanded of His people. But then we hear Jesus in today's Gospel Reading (Lk. 6:27ff), and we have to bow our heads in shame. Why? because we don't actually love our enemies or pray for those who mistreat us as Jesus says we must do. In fact, we actually think Jesus is crazy to expect us to "do good to those who hate" us. And no, we don't give to everyone who asks, let alone ever come close to Jesus' command in Luke 6:36, "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."
- ✘ So, the facts hit us all like a knife to the heart. Right here in this room; in this very sanctuary, there are no majestic pine trees. In this sinful flesh and blood, rooted deep into the soil of this corrupt world, we cannot, by ourselves ever inherit the kingdom of God.
 - ➔ In fact, in verses 33-34 Paul warns us against listening to those around us who say that the Bible is just a bunch of baloney. He warns us to stop being lazy in our faith where we just try to ignore these truths; hoping that they will just go away. He says, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals.' Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some (of you) have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame," says Paul.

III. In Christ "all will be Restored to Life"

- ✘ You see, Paul does not want any of us to miss out on Christ's inexpressible gift to come! So we must make sure that his truth-filled words of sin and death don't cause us to skip over or forget the rest of what he has to tell us here about resurrection and new life!
 - ➔ The second half of verses 21 and 22 keep us grounded where Christ says we must be as His beloved children of faith. Verse 21, "...by a man (Jesus) has come also the resurrection of the dead." And verse 22, "...so also in Christ all will be restored to life."

→ Yes, just as surely as we are sinful and mortal like Adam, so also shall we be entirely clean and pure and sinless in the blood of Christ; as “those who belong to Christ” (v.23). Through faith in Him, God freely grants us eternal life in heaven. Romans 5:8 confirms it: “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” While we are still little pine seeds, Christ died here on the cross and was buried here in this earth so that we – even when we die and when we are buried here in this earth might be raised up on the Last Day as majestic pines.

✘ Here’s the point: the resurrection only happens because of Christ’s death first. Sin must be dealt with; must be covered with Christ’s blood before death loses its power and life takes over for good!

→ Martin Luther had a neat way of looking at this passage. In response to Paul’s preview, he wrote, “Thus, the cemetery or burial ground does not indicate a heap of the dead, but a field of kernels, known as God’s kernels, which will verdantly blossom and grow more beautifully than can be imagined.” What a great way to look at Christian cemeteries. Just as Paul assures us in Romans 6:5, “If we have been united with [Christ] in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.”

✘ You see, those verses about the death we deserve are not a reason to despair, but the reason to open our eyes to God’s Good News proclaimed after our text, in verse 50, where Paul says, “I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” This is a good thing, because it turns our perishable, dishonorable, weak bodies and souls to the one place; the one and only way that any of us can inherit the eternal kingdom of God – that is through the resurrection power and victory of Jesus Christ! That’s where verse 26 tells us, “the last enemy to be destroyed is death”; in and through Jesus alone.

→ Paul is clear in verse 42 that on the Last Day, the perishable body that dies and is sown in this earthly soil will be raised imperishable! The dishonorable body will be raised in glory! The weak body will be raised in power! These little seeds; you little seeds that are gathered here this morning at Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church...you will be raised into magnificent pines!

IV. Two Reasons for Paul’s Preview

✘ This is why Paul gives us great confidence as we think about the end of the world. In fact, he gives us this preview about the resurrection for two important reasons.

✘ First of all, he wants us to stand firm in our faith. Just as in Paul’s day, today there are many people misusing Scripture. Even if they have good intentions, so many people misinterpret Scripture by ignoring its context. This is why so many false books and movies like the “Left Behind” series are so popular. It’s also why entire church bodies exist that develop highly complicated, confusing and very false beliefs about the end times and Jesus’ return.

→ Paul warns us to “wake up” and live in God’s Word of truth, so that we will not be led astray by people who misunderstand what the Bible says. So, when we stick strictly to God’s Word in Scripture; when we don’t subtract from it or add to it any thoughts from imperfect humans, then none of these false interpretations will be able to turn us away from Christ and His glory on the Last Day.

✘ The second reason Paul gives us this preview is to encourage us to spread the Gospel. Because our faith is grounded in the Word, and because we are sure of what Christ has done for us, we follow the Spirit’s lead and we joyfully work toward bringing others to Christ as well.

→ It’s here that I’d like to think again about sneak previews. Why is it that movie-makers release those previews. Is it so that we will go back home and forget what we saw? Of course not! They give us previews so that we go back to work; to our homes, schools and the places that we play, and we then tell everyone else about what we know is “coming soon.”

- ⊗ How much more, then does God want us to leave here today, after hearing the preview of our future from Paul and now tell everyone God's message of salvation and resurrection! That's our mission as Christians; to share this Good News; to tell people about Jesus and His death and resurrection, which includes telling people about what is to come when Jesus returns.
 - ➔ Paul encourages us to understand that this is our life's work; each and every day until we take our last breath on this earth.
- ⊗ I know, it can often feel like our efforts to model the faith and share the Good News with others is of no effect. Sometimes it's discouraging. But Paul reminds us later on at the end of this great chapter, in verse 58, that our work is never in vain. "Therefore, my beloved brothers," Paul says, "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." Why not? because God is the one who promises to work through His Word that we share. He's the one who creates faith. We are merely the tools that He uses.

Conclusion

- ⊗ And so we spread this message; the message that everyone on earth; everyone in Ft. Lupton, CO needs to know. And folks, we live at a great time to tell them all about it. They've got the questions. They want to know about the end of the world. And although we don't know all the details, God has given us what they need to know; what those around us need for their salvation.
 - ➔ So when we see those majestic pine trees in the mountains; in the foothills or even in our neighborhoods, let them be Gods' great reminder of the wonderful blessings He has given us through His Son; of the great assurance that even though we may die before Jesus returns; even though we may be buried one day here in this world, we know that, in Jesus, we will rise as majestic pines in the eternal kingdom of God, because Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.*