

The Apostles' Creed: Week 15

...The resurrection of the body...

In the Scriptures:

1. The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

I said, “Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”

Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’ ”

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’ ” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.’ ”

(Ezekiel 37:1-14)

2. “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to

please myself but him who sent me.”

(John 5:24-30)

3. But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

(1 Corinthians 15:12-26)

As described by Christian writers:

4. Perish the thought that the omnipotence of the Creator is unable, for the raising of our bodies and for the restoring of them to life, to recall all their parts, which were consumed by beasts or by fire, or which disintegrated into dust or ashes, or were melted away into a fluid, or were evaporated away in vapors!

- Augustine, “The City of God”

5. But especially mark this, how very pointedly Paul says, "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." (1 Corinthians 15:53) For this body shall be raised not remaining weak as now; but raised the very same body, though by putting on incorruption it shall be fashioned anew — as iron blending with fire becomes fire, or rather as He knows how, the Lord who raises us. This body therefore shall be raised, but it shall abide not such as it now is, but an eternal body; no longer needing for its life such nourishment as now, nor stairs for its ascent, for it shall be made spiritual, a marvellous thing, such as we cannot worthily speak of.

...We shall be raised therefore, all with our bodies eternal, but not all with bodies alike: for if a man is righteous, he will receive a heavenly body, that he may be able

worthily to hold converse with Angels; but if a man is a sinner, he shall receive an eternal body, fitted to endure the penalties of sins, that he may burn eternally in fire, nor ever be consumed. And righteously will God assign this portion to either company; for we do nothing without the body. We blaspheme with the mouth, and with the mouth we pray. With the body we commit fornication, and with the body we keep chastity. With the hand we rob, and by the hand we bestow alms; and the rest in like manner. Since then the body has been our minister in all things, it shall also share with us in the future the fruits of the past. Therefore, brethren, let us be careful of our bodies, nor misuse them as though not our own. ...for we must give account to the Lord of all things done through the body.

- Cyril of Jerusalem, "Catechetical Lectures"

6. The first letter of John declares that when Jesus appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. The resurrection body of Jesus, which at the moment is almost unimaginable to us in its glory and power, will be the model for our own.

...What Paul is asking us to imagine is that there will be a new mode of physicality, which stands in relation to our present body as our present body does to a ghost. It will be as much more real, more firmed up, more bodily, than our present body as our present body is more substantial, more touchable, than a disembodied spirit. We sometimes speak of someone who's been very ill as being a shadow of their former self. If Paul is right, a Christian in the present life is a mere shadow of his or her future self, the self that person will be when the body God has waiting in his heavenly storeroom is brought out, already made to measure, and put on over the present one — or over the self that will still exist after bodily death.

- N.T. Wright, "Surprised by Hope"

Why we believe in the resurrection of the body:

- Christians inherit from Judaism the belief that every human who ever lived will rise bodily from the dead. Since this event will take place in the future (at the second coming), our belief is based on trust in the promises of God Almighty. However, Christians have an additional guarantee of it in history, since the Spirit has already raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Just as Christ rose, we too will rise in him. This gift is intended for the redemption of all humanity—but because it is our free choice whether to accept forgiveness for abusing our bodies, the final result may be either delight or suffering, based on who (or what) we've become.
- Sometimes religious people think of the body as a distraction or even a prison that we need to escape from to be truly spiritual. But God created us as human beings, with both a body and a spirit, and called it good! So it follows that a purely immaterial existence is *not* the fulfilment of our human nature. Christ became fully human in order heal our full nature, saving our bodies as well as our souls.