

2-20-22 St. Peter Lutheran Church, Doss, TX “After Death, Life Everlasting”

1 Corinthians 15:21-42 21 *So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. 22 Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. 23 But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back. 24 After that the end will come, when he will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, having destroyed every ruler and authority and power. 25 For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet. 26 And the last enemy to be destroyed is death. 30 And why should we ourselves risk our lives hour by hour? 31 For I swear, dear brothers and sisters, that I face death daily. This is as certain as my pride in what Christ Jesus our Lord has done in you. 32 And what value was there in fighting wild beasts—those people of Ephesus—if there will be no resurrection from the dead? And if there is no resurrection, “Let’s feast and drink, for tomorrow we die!” 33 Don’t be fooled by those who say such things, for “bad company corrupts good character.” 34 Think carefully about what is right, and stop sinning. For to your shame, I say that some of you don’t know God at all. 35 But someone may ask, “How will the dead be raised? What kind of bodies will they have?” 36 What a foolish question! When you put a seed into the ground, it doesn’t grow into a plant unless it dies first. 37 And what you put in the ground is not the plant that will grow, but only a bare seed of wheat or whatever you are planting. 38 Then God gives it the new body he wants it to have. A different plant grows from each kind of seed. 39 Similarly there are different kinds of flesh—one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. 40 There are also bodies in the heavens and bodies on the earth. The glory of the heavenly bodies is different from the glory of the earthly bodies. 41 The sun has one kind of glory, while the moon and stars each have another kind. And even the stars differ from each other in their glory. 42 It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. 43 Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. 44 They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies.*

We all have an expiration date. Paul addresses the issue in 1 Corinthians 15 about what happens to us after we die. We generally don’t think about those things. Even Jesus said, “31 ‘So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ 32 These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. 33 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously,

and he will give you everything you need. 34 “So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.” (Matthew 6)

But tomorrow is Monday and the scriptures say, “27 *And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment,* 28 *so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him.*” (Hebrews 9) We are all appointed once to die.

In C.S. Lewis’ book, The Great Divorce. The ‘divorce’ is the chasm between heaven and hell. It’s not about marriage. Luke 16 gives the basic story. It reads: 19 *Jesus said, “There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed in purple and fine linen and who lived each day in luxury. 20 At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. 21 As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man’s table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores. 22 “Finally, the poor man died and was carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the heavenly banquet. The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and he went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side. 24 “The rich man shouted, ‘Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames.’ 25 “But Abraham said to him, ‘Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish. 26 And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. No one can cross over to you from here, and no one can cross over to us from there.’ 27 “Then the rich man said, ‘Please, Father Abraham, at least send him to my father’s home. 28 For I have five brothers, and I want him to warn them so they don’t end up in this place of torment.’ 29 “But Abraham said, ‘Moses and the prophets have warned them. Your brothers can read what they wrote.’ 30 “The rich man replied, ‘No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will repent of their sins and turn to God.’ 31 “But Abraham said, ‘If they won’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they won’t be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”*

In Great Divorce, he has several stories of people being invited to heaven. One was a woman whose son had predeceased her and was in heaven. She told the one who invited her that she wanted her son. She didn’t care about heaven or God. She would rather have her son with her in hell than accept Jesus to go be with him in heaven. Her ultimate concern was not God or Jesus, but her son. Another man was invited to heaven. He was an Episcopal bishop. He said he would love to come but only if he could be useful. The one inviting said, God doesn’t need you to do anything for him. Then the bishop said that he wouldn’t come. His idol was his pride.

A man in our congregation had a wife of many years who died. He loved her and she, him. He wanted her back from heaven to be with him. He had many questions about how would he

find her in heaven and what would they look like and how would they communicate. He said that Jesus said that there was no marriage in heaven. Matthew 22 shows Jesus' exchange with the Sadducees about it. So, this widower had a lot of concerns almost to the point where God was in second place and his wife in first. The first commandment is clear when God says, "You shall have no other gods before me." Exodus 20 follows that commandment with God saying, "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods" or ultimate concerns is another way to put it.

Our text addresses the concerns of the Corinthians about death. Paul ends the chapter saying, "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." For just as Christ was raised from the dead, we will follow Him to heaven someday.

There are many books written about people who have died and came back. Some are called 'near-death' experiences by the secular world. One Baptist minister was coming home from a pastor's conference in Longview and in the fog was in a multiple car accident. The paramedics declared him dead. Another pastor on that road asked the paramedics if he could pray for him. They figured, 'No harm done' and gave him permission. He leaned in through the broken back window of the car and prayed for the pastor to come back. There was no response. He was moved to sing, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" and the man stirred. He went and told the paramedics and they wouldn't believe him. He persevered and they finally gave in, finding that the pastor in the crushed car was alive. Because of the fog, he couldn't go to the hospital by air evacuation, so was driven by ambulance over eight hours to Houston. He spent two years in the hospital and in rehab and wrote a book (hold up) about it. I met him. He said that when he died, he saw a beautiful light and gate and saw his deceased parents, former pastors who had died, and others who had pointed him to Jesus during his life. He felt the love of God but then he heard a song behind him, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" and came back.

Others have said they had died and experienced such great love that was beyond their earthly experience.

A man died in an ICU and was coded to be resuscitated. Two doctors, nurses, technicians all worked to bring him back. He said he saw them working on him from the ceiling looking down. Then he said resuscitated he rose up through the ceiling and went up into the stars but then had the impression that it was not his time to die. He started back toward the earth and saw one of the two doctors from the ICU go by him upward. When he was resuscitated, the staff told him that one of the doctors had a heart attack while he was trying to work on him. A second code was called as they worked on the doctor on the floor but it was not to be.

On my last day at Peterson Hospice, I was called out to see a woman who was a hospice patient and her daughter. I was told that the patient was actively dying. I was covering for

another chaplain who had been caring for her. When I arrived, the daughter was present but her mother was non-responsive. We prayed together for her mother. In our conversation, the daughter told me she was a believer and had a church home. She said that she and her husband were trying to have children and she had four miscarriages. Her last pregnancy was complicated due to bleeding. She died in the delivery room. She said she saw a beautiful light and at the gate were all four of her miscarried children as toddlers and her family and all the dogs she had ever owned who had died. That really got to me.

Finally, my dermatologist in San Angelo rode a recumbent bike around for enjoyment. He was on a country road and a truck cut a stop sign and hit him. He was brought into the hospital hanging on a thread to life. His heart stopped and he told me he saw a beautiful wall with bright light on the other side of it, but again, his impression was that it was not his time to die. He had been a committed Christian before and after that experience

I was doing my visitation ministry for Holy Ghost and discussing a comment one of the church members said during the Sunday school time last Sunday with Pastor Steve. She said that everyone in church was saved but what about the lost outside the church. What would he, if called, do about them? I told the person I was visiting that I thought she was overly general in her comment since many in church are *seekers* and not in a relationship with Jesus Christ. A small group who are *disciples* are in that growing relationship and there is even a smaller group you could call *apostles* since they are out doing something with their faith and relationship to the Lord. The person I was visiting said she didn't think we could really know Jesus until we go to heaven someday. And yet, Jesus wants that personal relationship with Him as he says in Rev.3:20, "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends."

We are all at different places in our relationship with God but we all can grow. That begins with the desire to do so and next to pray that we might get to know Him better and love Him more. After that, we wait for the answer to that prayer and find joy as it is answered. Sometimes that answer is difficult as when through God's Word you hear Jesus say, "Take up your cross and follow me" or "Love one another as I have loved you." Paul says to the Philippians and to us, (1:9ff) I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. 10 For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. 11 May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God." And to that I say, "Amen."