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**Resurrection People**  
**1 Corinthians 15:12-20**

*Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is **no resurrection** of the dead? <sup>13</sup> If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; <sup>14</sup> and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your **faith has been in vain**. <sup>15</sup> We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. <sup>17</sup> If Christ has not been raised, your **faith is futile and you are still in your sins**. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have died<sup>[e]</sup> in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> **If for this life only** we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.<sup>20</sup> But in fact **Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.***

As we hear these words about resurrection, it brings to mind our own experiences of death, and the loss of loved ones. As a pastor and chaplain, ***I've been around death and dying—a lot.*** And being with the dying, and their families, is incredibly ***sacred.*** It is beyond words to witness someone going from ***this life to the next.***

As Christians, we have something that makes that transition truly sacred—***a living God, who promises us new life here, and after death.*** We believe in the ***resurrection, of Jesus, and one day all of us,*** and that belief can give ***meaning and hope*** to our lives ***today.***

***But what do we MEAN by resurrection?***

***We don't mean resuscitation.***

That's what happened when Jesus raised ***Lazarus*** from death—it was a temporary, he did die again.

We believe that we will ***literally*** be resurrected.

And given a whole new ***body.***

When Paul was ***writing to the Corinthians***, they were a divided church, with disagreements about everything.

And apparently, ***some of them did not believe*** in the ***resurrection,***

And some believed in the resurrection, but ***not of the body.***

The same is true *today*.

A *majority of Americans* believe in life after death,  
but not *everyone* has a *Christian understanding* of resurrection.

In the Greco-Roman world, including Corinth,  
the idea of an afterlife was the *SEPARATION of the soul from the body*.  
At death, the physical body died,  
but the *soul went on*.

Many people have this *same idea today*.

In the early church this was known as *Gnosticism*.

The problem is ---Christians actually believe in the *resurrection of the BODY*.  
Not just the soul.

This is what we affirm in the *Apostle's Creed*.

*Why this idea of BODILY resurrection?*

It's from the early believers' accounts of seeing the *resurrected Jesus*,  
*not as a ghost, but as a human*, walking, talking,  
even eating with them in Emmaus, and on the beach! (Luke 24 and John 21).

When Jesus appeared in the *upper room* to his fearful disciples,  
he came as man, with a physical body.  
He was so real that He encouraged Thomas  
to *touch the scars in his hand and side!*

Think about that.

Jesus was not a ghost. Ghosts are dead.

When people saw *Jesus, he was ALIVE—body and soul*.

It was Jesus, but with a *new, transformed body*.

This part about being made *new, whole, and complete* is important,  
because this is what we believe about *humanity, AND all of creation*.  
Paul reminds us in *Romans 8* that all creation groans for redemption and new life.  
In *Revelation 21*, we hear about a new heaven and earth—  
not just a spiritual world of disembodied souls.

This is *hard* to understand!

But we affirm the resurrection of the body to *eternal life*.

AND, we believe that *all creation will be one day be made new, and perfect*.

In Pastor Adam Hamilton's book *Unafraid*,  
 He compares resurrection to *getting a new cell phone in today's world...*  
 Adam Hamilton, *Unafraid*, pg. 212.

Today, smartphones are almost always *backed up in 'the cloud'*.  
 So when you get a brand new physical phone,  
 it *populates with 'YOU'*—all your personal data.  
*It is essentially your phone, in a new body.*

Which is similar to the bodily resurrection.  
 We'll receive a *whole, new, perfect body*.  
 Which is *so comforting when you think about it*.

We believe that when a *child* with severe illness dies,  
 they are resurrected with a new, whole, healthy body.  
 When someone dies after a long battle with cancer, or Alzheimers,  
 Or someone is in a horrible accident, or commits suicide,  
 they are resurrected with *a brand new body*.

Do we allow this to bring us *hope*?  
 Because that's what Jesus wants us to have.  
*To know that a loved one is at peace, no longer suffering, hurting, or afraid.*  
 This is ultimately *what we want* for those we love, after death, isn't it?

This idea of resurrection is actually *central* to the Gospels.  
 Theologian John S. Whale once said that "the Gospels don't explain the  
 resurrection; *the resurrection explains the Gospels.*"  
 It's true—without the resurrection,  
 most of the writings of the New Testament would *not exist*.

*The resurrection also gives meaning to life today.*  
*C.S. Lewis* used to say that he believed in the resurrection  
 the same way he believed in the *sun*,  
 "not only because I can see it, but because *by it I see everything else*".

That's us.  
*By resurrection, we understand our Christian faith!*

And we believe that Jesus *conquered sin* on the cross.  
 And he *conquered death* in the resurrection.  
 So, we are *no longer in our sins*.  
 And *Death no longer has the last word*.

This is what *Paul means* when he says:

*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.*

<sup>18</sup> *Then those also who have died<sup>e]</sup> in Christ have perished.* <sup>19</sup> *If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

*So, how does resurrection bring YOU HOPE?*

So many of our *fears today* are about *what might happen to us*.  
 But ultimately, nothing that happens is the end of our story—  
 because we look forward to new and everlasting life with God!

*We do not need to fear anything*—Jesus has already won the battle for us.  
*We may die, but we will live.*

This is what Jesus said in John 11: *I am the resurrection and the life.*  
*Those who believe in me, though they die, yet shall they live.*

We believe in resurrection of the body,  
 because we have *bodies* that were *made* by God, are *loved* by God,  
 that one day they will be *made perfect* by God.

This means we *need to use our bodies today for God's work*,  
 and *one day in heaven*, we'll use them for God's glory.

Resurrection is a foundation *for stewardship*—taking care of our bodies,  
 and taking care of God's creation.

God gave us bodies and the physical world—for a reason!

Resurrection is also a foundation for *social justice* today.

We are called to *use our bodies for good* in this world!

We have an *incarnational faith*—

just like Jesus came in the flesh, known as the Incarnation,  
 we live in the flesh to do God's work in this world.

And we are called to work for *justice today*,  
*even as we believe in justice when Christ comes again.*

Shawnthea Monroe wrote in *Christian Century*: *Every day I see people putting their **Christian faith into action**, sometimes at great personal risk. They deliver meals in dangerous neighborhoods. They visit people convicted of violent crimes. They march in protest and dare to declare that black lives matter. For their sakes, I hold fast to the bodily resurrection. As Tom Long writes, “A **Christ whose resurrection occurs only in our minds has no right to call us to put our bodies on the line for justice.**”* Shawnthea Monroe, Lectionary Commentary, *The Christian Century*, March 10, 2016

Belief in physical resurrection gives *meaning to all social justice*.  
As we work for justice,  
we do it with the belief that life today is *not the end of our story*.  
And *death is not the end, either*.

Belief in the power of the resurrection—for today and tomorrow—is *transformative*.  
And it was life-changing for *blacks in America who were enslaved*.  
In fact, the early African-American *spirituals* sung by slaves depicted the *hope of the resurrection* in amazing ways.  
The spirituals were songs of deliverance, hope, endurance,  
and they were based on the ideas of freedom and resurrection.

Many Christian slave owners didn’t want to hear African music,  
but if the songs *were ‘Christian’ they welcomed* their slaves singing.  
Most slave owners had no idea the deep meaning of these songs,  
and some twisted the whole thing—  
by sadly saying that *if the slaves were singing, surely they were happy!*

In reality, they were singing their sorrow, mixed with hope.  
*Spiritual songs started out quietly, in small groups* of slaves,  
but they grew to be a force in the larger *fight for freedom*.

The spirituals helped them to *share sorrow*,  
and it gave them *hope to help endure the horror and trauma of slavery*.  
These songs *encouraged* people to keep the faith and keep on going.  
It gave them the *hope of freedom*—if not literally, then at least in their hearts.  
Most songs were *passed along*, not written down,  
and the tunes and lyrics were sometimes updated in different circumstances.

Slaves also used spirituals *to communicate, in coded language.*

These field songs might contain messages, to pass information from row to row, or even from one plantation to another.

Coded spirituals were used to pass covert messages, and to facilitate the *escape of slaves along the Underground Railroad.*

Harriet Tubman and “Peg Leg Joe,” two of the most notable “conductors,” relied on coded spirituals to encourage and direct slaves to escape to the North. John Ponomarenko, “Coded Slave Songs,” *The Soul Review*

<http://www.localdial.com/users/jsyedu133/Soulreview/Understandingpages/coded.htm>.

The spirituals—their *hope, and talk of resurrection,* helped slaves deal with the *constant threat of death.*

Something that sadly *still exists TODAY,*  
*for so many of our black brothers and sisters.*

Blacks are especially vulnerable to *premature death in this country.*

Infant and maternal mortality are high for blacks because of access to healthcare, And biased healthcare, blacks die of covid at higher rates for the same reasons, and then there is the threat of violence against blacks, and the injustice involved in crime and imprisonment.

Kaitlyn Greenidge wrote “*Black Spirituals as Poetry and Resistance*”.

As she researched this music, she spoke to many older blacks in Brooklyn who had moved up from the South.

She learned that talking about death is sacred.

It’s not right to *ask when someone DIED.*

Instead you ask about when someone *passed away, or passed over, or went to their homecoming.*

Talking about death in this way is *more personal than just saying ‘died’, in a society that doesn’t take the death of black people personally enough.*

Greenidge writes that black spirituals were *both poetry and resistance songs,* and they often answered profound questions about life and death, bondage and freedom.

These beautiful songs were a combination of *West African and American Christian music,* and this music led to blues and jazz, gospel and R&B, rock and roll and hip-hop.

Kaitlyn Greenidge, *Black Spirituals as Poetry and Resistance*, nytimes.com, March 5, 2021

**Howard Thurman** in 1945 wrote

“*Deep River: An Interpretation of Negro Spirituals*”,

He asserted that the spirituals were sung about death, to recognize that God is more powerful than white supremacy and slavery, and there is a ***world beyond*** this one, and not every person (including some slave owners) would be going there.

Because of the ***deep and troubling history*** of spirituals, singing one in church is something ideally done with ***respect and understanding***. Right after Emancipation, some black colleges like Fisk University in Nashville, sent singers traveling around America and Europe, singing spirituals. One member wrote how hard that was—knowing the history of these songs. They were hesitant to sing them for white audiences at first. But as they sang, they realized the ***profound beauty and power*** in them. Kaitlyn Greenidge, *Black Spirituals as Poetry and Resistance*, nytimes.com, March 5, 2021

To ***honor the history*** of spirituals,  
And their ***powerful message about death and resurrection***,  
amidst the horrors of slavery,  
today some predominantly white congregations  
are ***paying royalties*** when they sing them.  
They are donating to black musicians, or black music programs whenever they sing spirituals like *Lord, I Want to be a Christian*,  
*Swing Low Sweet Chariot*, *This Little Light of Mine*, and others.

Because, whenever we buy sheet music or hymnals,  
***royalties are paid*** to those composers for their songs,  
but ***not for spirituals***.  
So some congregations feel that giving to a black music program or musician is one small step for justice today.  
<https://www.npr.org/transcripts/1071542936>  
Scott Simon, *Some white congregations are paying to use hymns written by enslaved African people*, January 8, 2022, npr.org

The least we can do is ***learn the history*** of these powerful songs,  
In order to sing them with respect and understanding.

Today as we talk of hope, and spirituals, it's fitting that we also celebrate a former African-American ***Music Director*** here at FPC Matawan, ***Mr. Charlie Frost***. Charlie was here in the 70's, and taught many family members of people who are still here today! We are so grateful for his ministry here.

Friends, hear the *Good News of the Gospel* for us today:

*Because of Jesus Christ, we have the hope of resurrection.*

A hope that can change our lives *today*, and *for all eternity*.

**Death** is not the end, **trials and troubles** are not the end of our story.

We have work to do in our precious bodies,

And one day God will make all of them, and all of creation, new.

*We are resurrection people.*

And for the gift of resurrection, all God's people can say together, Amen.