

My purpose in preaching this sermon is that we should spend some time imagining our participation in the resurrection.

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

*"Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?"*

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Imagine.

In John Lennon's 1971 hit song, Mr. Lennon imagined things like nobody having any possessions to be greedy over; he imagined a world with no wars and nothing to die for; he imagined "all the people living life in peace." Of course, he admitted that he was a dreamer; but at least he wasn't the only one, and perhaps if everyone began to dream the same dream together, then maybe that dream might actually come true: and then "the world will be as one."

That was Lennon's imagination; that was his dream. What is it that you imagine? What do you spend your time dreaming about? Perhaps spending your time dreaming about something seems far too impractical for some of us; we choose instead to focus on our daily tasks, keep putting one foot in front of the other, and just get the job done rather than wasting our time dreaming.

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Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream, too. Among other things, Reverend King dreamed that his “four little children [would] one day live in a nation where they [would] not be judged by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character.” It was this dream of a nation in which people of all races would be able to live and work and play together that produced some of the greatest advancements against the blatantly racist legislation and policies of the southern United States. This dream was certainly not impractical; nor was the time that Reverend King spend dreaming it wasted time.

What do you spend your time dreaming about? When you begin to think about life as it could be – perhaps as it *should* be – what do you imagine?

One day we will all be changed.

In this portion of scripture, Paul sets a dream before the Corinthians. He encourages them to use their imaginations: to imagine the resurrection. On that day, Paul writes, we will all be changed. Do you ever dream about the resurrection? Do you ever try to imagine what it will be like on that day when Jesus returns and, as Paul wrote it in Philippians, “He will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body”?

The vision of “going to heaven when we die” doesn’t often leave us much to dream about, except that it’s not going to hell. The vision of the resurrection, however, gives us plenty to dream about. The resurrection will radically change who we are.

This whole discussion begins with Paul anticipating a question: What kind of body will resurrected people come with? Paul’s answer to that question is that the resurrected body will be radically different. It will certainly still be a body, just as Jesus was resurrected as a body. Jesus’ resurrected body was very similar to his crucified body (it still bore the scars of his crucifixion, he still ate, and he was recognizable to his disciples), yet his resurrected body was radically different. Most significantly, Jesus’ resurrected body was no longer subject to the power of death. Having dies and then having been raised from the dead, death no longer had any power over him.

The principle distinction that Paul makes between the body that is sown and the body that is raised is that the two are differently powered. “The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weak ness, it is raised in strength; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.” This is a radical change of ability, not of stuff. One could perhaps compare two car engines, one powerful and the other useless. Both will have the same components made of the same materials in roughly the same configuration. But one, being better engineered and assembled, will outperform the other. In that same kind of way, the spiritual body will, in every possible way, outperform the natural body.

That word “natural could possibly be better translated as “soul-driven.” The comparison that Paul is making is between the sown “soul-driven” body and the raised “spirit-driven body. He is driving towards the comparison between the first Adam and the last Adam. In Genesis 2:7 we read that, after God had formed Adam out of the dust, he breathed breath of life into him and he became a living being. That same word there translated as “being” is often translated as “soul” (both in the Hebrew and Greek Old Testaments). This is the distinction that Paul makes: that the first Adam, a living soul, is fatally underpowered compared to the last Adam, Jesus, who is not just living but is, in fact, life-giving. So all of those who, like Adam, are powered by the soul are likewise mortal, weak, and dishonoured. But the last

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Adam, Jesus, is not mortal, weak, and dishonoured. The reality of Christ is that he has been raised from the dead. So also all those who belong to him will be made like him when they also are raised from the dead. And in that moment we will all be changed.

When the dead in Christ are raised incorruptible, immortal, and spiritual, they will live by a radically different power than when they lived as corruptible, mortal, and soul-driven. Do you ever dream about that kind of change? Do you ever stop what you're doing for a few minutes just to imagine what it will be like to participate in the resurrection? Have you ever wondered what it will be like to live in a perfectly powered body, so that everything you do is always the right thing to do at the right time with the right result? Do you ever dream about what that would be like? Imagine a life in which you always say the right thing at the right time. Imagine what it will be like never to question your own motives because you are always and only motivated by the Spirit of Christ. Imagine the best possible life that surpasses all of your wildest dreams. That is the resurrection. Do you ever wonder what that will be like?

No, the resurrection is not a place where all your dreams come true.

I want to be careful to say that the resurrection is not a place where everybody's dreams come true. I don't mean that everything a Christian dreams of is what he receives in the resurrection. And the reason why not is quite simple: as mortal, corrupt, and soul-driven beings, we often enough end up dreaming about the wrong things. Many people, even Christians, have appetites for things that they probably shouldn't have. And in the resurrection, nobody will receive anything that they shouldn't have. It isn't all of *our* dreams that are going to come true in the resurrection. It is *God's* imagination that will be entirely fulfilled in the resurrection.

I don't think I'm out of line in saying that God has an imagination. Imagination is the ability to think of something that, as yet, is not. If God could think up this entire creation before it existed, then God has an imagination. And it is God's imagination that will be fulfilled at the resurrection, not ours.

What will it be like when God's imagination is fulfilled? What will it be like to live in a place where God's dreams are fulfilled? That time and place is the resurrection, when Jesus returns, claims all that is rightfully his, and hands the kingdom over to his Father. Do you ever wonder what that will be like? Do you ever stop what you're doing long enough to devote some time to imagining your participation in the resurrection?

Spend some time dreaming.

Here is our application this morning: it's good to spend some time dreaming. Spending time imagining what life will be like in the resurrection is a good thing. Why is dreaming about the resurrection a good thing? Because the hope of what is yet to come motivates us to do the right thing now. The very next word that Paul uses is "Therefore": "Therefore, my beloved brothers, stand firm, always abounding in the work of the Lord." It isn't with a threat of fire and brimstone that Paul challenges the Corinthians to action. It is rather with the hope of resurrection that the Corinthian saints are motivated.

The hope of resurrection is the expectation of becoming the person that God dreams you should be. It is this hope that ought to drive a person to cling to his faith in Christ. Only by clinging to his faith does a person "attain to the resurrection of the dead" (Php 3:10-11). What reason does a person have to hope to attain to the resurrection? Certainly the resurrection is better than being cast into hell, the resurrection

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is much more than something that is not bad. The hope of the resurrection ought to motivate us to persevere in our faith.

If we understand who God wants us to be, and if we understand who we will become at the resurrection, then our hope in the resurrection is plenty of motivation for us to persevere in our faith. This is why it is a good thing us to spend some time imagining – dreaming about – who we will become in the resurrection.

If you are a Christian, then, at the return of Christ and the resurrection of those who belong to him, you will be changed into someone who always delights in only ever always doing what brings honour and glory to God. Does that cause you any excitement? Or is that just humdrum boring? If doing what brings honour and glory to God seems boring to you, the may not be a Christian.

Do you dream about finally being able to do what God calls you to do? Do you dream about a day when at last you will only want to do the same things that God wants?

What do you dream about? If you consider yourself a Christian – a follower of Christ – the challenge to you and to me is that we should take great delight in dreaming of the resurrection. Imagine a time and place in which everything you say and think and do is only ever always exactly the same thing that Jesus would say and think and do if he were in your place. Dos that thought bring you any joy?

Imagine yourself in a time and place in which everybody only ever always does exactly the same thing. Do you ever spend any time dreaming about that? Perhaps most importantly, what will change in you at the resurrection? Who will you become when God raises you from the dead, finally able to do and think and say everything that God has been imagining for you?