

“I Am the Resurrection and the Life” - John 11.25-26 – Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

THE APOSTLES' CREED: I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

The Rev. Adam Hamilton, who wrote the sermon series and book *Creed*, based on the Apostles' Creed, focuses on these three points in this final message: **What happens after death? What is heaven like? And how does faith help us face our own death and the deaths of others?** What happens after death? We touched on it in the second week as we talked about the final judgement of Christ and return to it here. There were people at the time when Jesus walked on the earth, the group known as the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They believed, as some people do today, that when you're dead, you're dead. But, we who believe in the Easter resurrection of Jesus cannot believe that way, however, for we believe in life conquering death, and an eternal, everlasting life beyond this life.

Over the years, there are those who have speculated what happens after death. Hamilton in his book offers a diagram of what some believed would happen, immediately after death all souls go to a waiting area called Sheol or Hades. But it is divided between a good place for good souls and bad place for bad souls. I would see it like the airport terminal we are on our way to fly off to heaven hopefully, but before we board we sit in the cramped seats in the overcrowded boarding area, unless we are a VIP and then we get to sit in the VIP lounge known as paradise. As we saw earlier in the creed there was a belief in the final judgement when Jesus returns and judges the living and the dead, and those here and those in the waiting room after this life will be judged and either fly up, up and away or take the express tunnel down to the other place. Having read and heard stories of near-death experiences and people passing down a tunnel and there experiencing people who had died and many stories of people seeing and talking with Jesus, I believe there is a fantastic journey and experience in the next chapter of our lives. But I will wait till then to spend all eternity experiencing it. Here and now, I don't know about you, but I want to spend my time learning how to fully live in the here and now.

What is heaven like? Adam Hamilton shares his understanding based on what Jesus described in his parables – heaven being like a wedding banquet – a great festive party and celebration. I can imagine it as a reunion with those who have gone before us. If you think for a moment there are probably a few people you want to look for when you first get there, the loved ones we have missed the most here since their deaths, famous people we have admired and wished we would have known, all those people we have ever wondered about what ever happened to them. I expect it will take all eternity to get around to seeing everyone there is for us to see. And yes, I believe there will be some who want to come around to see us. Some of them might even be surprised to see that we made it! As fun as it might be to speculate on the hereafter. My focus today is on the here and now.

How does faith help us face our own death and the deaths of others? He notes that how you face death changes how you face life! As a pastor I have been called on to conduct funerals for some families who have no faith in Jesus or an afterlife. Their grief is palpable as they believe they will never see their loved one again. You may have experienced that finality of death from some of your friends and neighbors. If they believe this is all there is, then there is nothing to look forward to and no better place their loved ones are going to, when they're dead, they're dead – and gone forever.

But we, who believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting, look forward to bodies beyond sickness or injury, beyond age and frailty. So, I am not afraid of death. For me it is the ending of this chapter and the beginning of a new one. I have been with a number of people as they have neared death and been able to talk with them and their loved ones around them and bless them through the final stage of this life and wish them bon voyage on the journey to the next one. And when we gather for their funerals, it is not a time of grieving their death but of celebrating their life – and their life eternal!

Now, let me be honest. When I think of the resurrection of the body, I'm not thinking of this old one. No, I'm looking for one that is 6'4" in his twenties, thin and muscular! Laugh if you will, some of you think we will look like what we do at death, but the Easter story does not give us that. Mary Magdalene didn't recognize Jesus – she thought he looked like the 6'4" gardener! And to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, he didn't look like himself, he looked like a stranger. So, when you get to heaven and go looking for your former pastor, ol' what's his name, way on down the list after everyone you really want to see, don't look for this guy, just look for the guy who's tall, dark and handsome. For me, believing in a life everlasting helps me focus not on that life but on living this life to its fullest. Jesus spoke more about living this life than the life to come. He called us to live into that eternal kingdom of heaven in the here and now. We are called to live, love, care and forgive. We are called to make disciples and change the world here and now.

I was reminded of a speech made by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "I've been to the Mountain Top" in 1968. He said, "It's all right to talk about long white robes over yonder, in all of its symbolism. But ultimately people want some suits and dresses and shoes to wear down here! It's all right to talk about streets flowing with milk and honey, but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and his children who can't eat three square meals a day. It's all right to talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day, God's preacher must talk about the new New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia, the new Los Angeles, the new Memphis, Tennessee. This is what we have to do."

So, here is what I wrote for my creed. **I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. But I also believe that I still have a lot to do for Jesus here in this life and will strive to do it as long as ever I can.** Affirm what you believe and live what you believe as we enter into Holy Week and prepare for Easter. Alleluia and Amen.

In a World Full of Pain and Strife

Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs 3/18/24

In a world full of pain and strife,
What might we do somehow?
Not focused on the afterlife,
But people here and now.

As long as God gives us the strength,
our job is not quite done.
In faith we'll go that extra length,
that we might help someone.

A day will come. We'll rest in peace,
For all eternity.
Our life's work will finally cease.
We'll find serenity.

Although today is not that day,
We still have work to do.
Do all you can. God's will obey,
Each and every day through.