Isaiah 65:17–25

**“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. 18But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. 19I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. 20No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. 21They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. 22They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. 23They shall not labor in vain**

**or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their descendants with them. 24    Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. 25The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,” says the Lord.**

1 Corinthians 15:19–26

**If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. 20But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26The last enemy to be destroyed is death.**

Luke 24:1–12

**But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. 2And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. 5And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? 6He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” 8And they remembered his words, 9and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, 11but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.**

Without Easter?

Easter!  The greatest day of the year because it celebrates the greatest day in history!  The entire Christian religion is based on our Lord’s resurrection from the dead, and it is an inexhaustible source for doctrine, confession, life, and celebration.  Why, then, do so many people misunderstand Easter and reduce it to a celebration of spring or use it as an opportunity for wearing new clothes and overindulging in chocolate?  Don’t they know what they’re missing?  After all, what would life be without Easter?

Well, first our text says, **“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile**.”  For example:

Take away Easter, and we are no longer the first fruits of Christ’s resurrection.

Take away Easter, and you take away the forgiveness, for Easter tells us that Good Friday worked: God has accepted the sacrifice of his Son.

Take away Easter, and you put everything back, everything bad that is.   You put back into power the devil, with his hold over you in sin and death.

Take away Easter, and you take away life, because death now becomes everybody’s eternal destiny, everybody’s fate.  Yours and mine too.

**“If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”**

Take away Easter, and you take away the glorified body, described in this chapter of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 15, the glorified body is the highest Christian hope, not only life forever, but an embodied life and one so glorious that we can hardly imagine it.

But at this idea, the resurrection of the body, some of the first Christians in Corinth balked.  How can this be, they asked.  When you’re dead, you’re dead!

Well, it sure looks that way.  If you’ve had anything at all to do with dead bodies, you know the Corinthians were right.  Dead people do not come back to life.  Reality is not a zombie movie with the dead walking again.  Here and now, life always ends in real death.  Fight it or deny it, maybe even ignore it.  Choose whatever strategy you like.  It doesn’t matter one little bit.  Death always wins.  It happens to everyone.  It’s final; it’s permanent.  When you’re dead, you’re dead.

Or so it seems.  But Easter turns that all around. “**But” now! “in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”**  Our Lord Jesus Christ arose from the dead.  He lives, and because He lives you will too, and with a glorified body: **“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”**

But what does that mean?  “A glorified body”?  Again, some of the Corinthians were skeptical.  Hard enough to imagine breathing new life into a dead corpse, but what then?  A second death?  Not at all, but difficult to describe, and so the apostle resorts to antitheses, the negation of what we do know and experience.  OK, let’s think about this for a moment.

Paul writes a little bit later in this chapter: **“So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power**.”  “Perishable,” “dishonor,” “weakness,” that’s us, that’s our experience of bodies and life.  Since we know no other way, we are used to this reality and these bodies.  And in spite of all their frailties, we like our bodies, love our bodies.  In fact, let’s be honest about this: we don’t just live in our bodies, we are our bodies, and they are us.

And, these bodies, natural and earthly though they may be, they are still pretty impressive, both individually and collectively.  God has given humanity precisely what we need for creating and maintaining our lives, in fact, we given not just what we need but often what we want and what gives us pleasure.  So we not only live life in these bodies, but we also enjoy it, at least some of the time.

But that’s the rub, isn’t it?  “Some of the time.”  Sometimes more, sometimes less, but always just “some of the time.”  For our bodies are perishable and weak.

Now is a wonderful time to be alive in these bodies, since here in the twenty-first century we enjoy all kinds of methods, tools, and medicines to take care of and help these bodies, everything from exercise machines to heart transplants.  You name it, and we’ve got it, at least when compared with all those previous generations, so that life expectancy in the modern world is higher than it has ever been.

And yet, in spite of everything, we still know what Paul means by weak and perishable.  Two thousand years after Paul, our bodies are just like those of the apostle and his contemporaries: they get old, they wear out, they die.  That “last enemy,” as Paul calls it, death, is always out there lingering.  Sooner or later, we all experience this.  And it’s not pleasant.

Oh, at first, you may make light of it.  So what if you lose your hair at twenty?  At least if you’re a man, it’s no big deal.  And so what if you start to go a little bit gray at twenty-five?  That’s no big deal either.  You can always cover it up.

But then there are the aches and pains that linger longer than they used to, the bifocals, the age spots on your hands and face, the need for more sleep, more energy.  All this is weakness.  Some of you know it already, and all of you will, at least if you make it that far, because, of course, not everyone does.

For death can strike the very young and will always strike the very old. Many, many times before it finally arrives, the weakness of the body so shapes the self that some people begin to long for death.

We do indeed live in the body, but we also die in the body.

And, oh, yes, just one thing more: we also sin in the body.  For this flesh is not only weak and perishable, but it is also dishonorable, and this, too, is a cause for great grief.

We are subject to the appetites of our body, immoderate and excessive.  Our hands do things they shouldn’t; our feet take us places we shouldn’t go; our minds conceive the worst wickedness; and our tongues, well, our tongues are completely out of control.  From first to last, life in the body is a life in sin, and we know no other reality.

And for Christians, this really hurts.  The new man or woman inside us doesn’t want to sin.  We really do want to please God.  Yet, though we live by the forgiveness of sins and though the Spirit sanctifies us day by day, nonetheless, we have to admit just like St Paul did, **“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. . . . Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”**

Yes, who?

Jesus Christ, of course.

And how?  By Easter.  By Easter and the sure promise of a glorified body: not weak but powerful, not perishable but imperishable, not dishonorable but glorious, glorious and glorified, like His: For **“just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.”**  **“[Christ is] the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. . . . By a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. . . . So also in Christ shall all be made alive. . . . Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. . . . The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”**  That’s the promise.  That’s the victory of Easter.

So thank God for Easter, and thank God for the resurrection, His, of course, but ours too! Amen.