

Dear friends in Christ.

Once again, our meditation this morning is based on 1 Corinthians chapter 15, following the theme of the resurrections of the dead. And the hope we have in Christ, especially the hope of living with Christ for eternity in Heaven.

You know, people have different beliefs when it comes to heaven, or hell for that matter. For some like Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Heaven and Hell are Conditions of the Soul.’” Miguel de Unamuno asks: “What is heaven if not a bravery, and what is hell if not a threat?” Sure, a poetic and a philosophical view of heaven and hell. But they are not far from what many believe around us.

But if that is the case then Paul says, “If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” (v. 33) Who cares about Church, or our neighbours, or faith itself, right?

Now, tell that to so many martyrs who have died because of their faith. Tell that to Oscar Romero, the Salvadorian Archbishop who was killed while preaching, back in the 1980’s, just because he was defending the rights of the poor and the downtrodden, the decriminalized, and persecuted. He used to say “I must tell you, as a Christian, I do not believe in death without resurrection.”

Or Bonhoeffer who declared that the church must not simply “bandage the victims under the wheel, but jam a spoke in the wheel itself.”¹ He lost his life as he opposed the Deutsche Christen and Hitler himself.

Or tell that to those countless martyrs who are being killed now around the world because of their faith, because they refused to renounce their Savior, in Nigeria, in Egypt, and Mexico, and all over.

Paul tells the Corinthians he fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, presumably because he would not compromise his Christianity. Authorities threatened Paul repeatedly during his ministry. But Paul kept preaching Jesus, even when, eventually, he was killed for doing so.

Do you want to imitate Paul and those martyrs of our time? I do, and 1 Corinthians 15 will help. Even if—or actually because—Paul is blunt. He says “As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (v 22). In this declaration there are only two possibilities. Either we die like Adam, in Adam or live with Christ, in Christ. Now, because we are on this side of eternity, actually both can happen to you

¹ David Ford, *The Modern Theologians*, p. 38

Christian. You die like Adam but you could also live with Christ, in Christ. But, whatever happens, here is the good news, we don't fear living and even dying for Christ, because while in Adam all die, in Christ all will be made alive, and yes will be with Christ for Eternity.

The truth is that in Adam, all die. All. No exceptions. That is in the flesh. You have Adam as an ancestor. So, the next time you're at a funeral, take a good long look at the body in the casket. Unless Jesus returns quickly, the day is coming when that will be you and me. It is not a demoralizing statement; it is just the truth.

You bury me in a solid gold casket or in a cardboard box, here is the fact, I'll be dead, it makes no difference how expensive a casket is. You can cover my grave with a blanket of beautiful bouquets where the all the flowers will hide the dirt. It will look wonderful, but they will not change the fact that I'll still be a lifeless corpse six feet under the soil. It is the same with you, and all because you and I are connected to Adam. And in Adam we all die.

How does the triage nurse in the emergency room determine if the unresponsive body that just arrived is dead or alive? Feel for a pulse, right? And check for breath. If possible, maybe find out if there are brain waves. If you have a pulse and breath and brain waves, you have life, right? Maybe, but...

A few years ago, I was in bed sick with flue or something when one afternoon my kids came back from school, one of them asked how was I doing. "how are you doing father, he asked" "O son, I'm dying" I responded back looking for some sympathy. And you know how he answered me back? "o, aren't we all..." no sympathy, just some plain truth. You, we started dying the moment you and I were conceived. Did you know that?!

Although it was not like that for Adam. Adam started with life that did not have to end in death. Adam enjoyed a carefree existence. He could eat from apple trees, peach trees, mango trees, and especially from the life tree there in the garden of Eden.

God wanted Adam to continue living. So, God told Adam not to eat from that one tree. From the only tree with deadly fruit. God was protecting Adam. God warned that eating that fruit would kill Adam. Maybe Adam did not believe the consequences could be that dire. God says ignoring his Commandments will kill us. But we're tempted to believe the consequences could not be that dire. So, we sin. And we die.

Someone asked this question "Why would anyone willingly worship a god that has to bribe it worshiper with Heaven in order to get them to worship it? While inversely has to threaten those that don't fall into line with hell? Is it out of fear? Is it out of cultural habit?"

Well friend, none of that of that, but Adam is to blame. Yet we can try to keep blaming Adam. After all, you inherited sin from him. But Adam himself isn't the one listening to the devil when you break God's Commandments. You are. I am. Adam isn't the one who's harboring anger in his heart toward the person who makes you mad. Adam doesn't force you to curse. Or lie. Or covet. Adam is not the one afraid to live for Jesus. You are.

You and I are in Adam. And in Adam all die. There is nothing you can do to stop that reality or reverse that reality. We may as well eat, drink, and indulge all our sinful natures' desires, because tomorrow we die.

That is, unless we have another Adam. We all perish eternally, unless there is a human like the original and free fall Adam but unlike us, an Adam who starts life without any of our sinful inclinations. A second Adam who will do what the first Adam failed to do. Heed God's warnings. And resist every enticement of the devil. And then this Second Adam would have to do something even more, something unthinkable and unlikely. He'd have to be willing to die for people who ignore his warnings.

Jesus is the Second Adam who volunteers to do just that. Even when we are deserving only death because of our sins. He takes the blame for the sin that kills us. Your sin kills him instead of you. That leaves you sinless.

That is why we clothe the newly baptized in white. It reminds us that Jesus declares us clean before the Father, with our sins wiped out by the work of Jesus on the cross. And he does that continually as we continually are drawn to him in the confession of our sin, receiving constantly his absolution, in there declaring that our debt is paid in full and that there is no more hell, but the promise of life eternal, with resurrected bodies with.

That's why when Paul speaks of Christians who have died, he sometime calls them asleep. Oh, make no mistake; the bodies of Christians die. The wages of sin is death. We will collect our paycheck. But when you are in Christ, that death is not permanent. It is temporary. Like sleep. That's what Paul means that when our bodies are buried, they will be sleeping and will be awoken, resurrected, at the second coming of Christ.

One Greek word for resurrection means "to be awakened." If you die before our Lord's final advent, before the day Jesus returns, I picture him reaching down into your grave, tapping you on the shoulder, and saying, "It's time to wake up." Then you will wake up from death just like you wake up each morning. You will get up out of your grave like you get up out of your bed. Because whether you've been dead only a few minutes or for a few centuries at his return, you still will be baptismally linked to the risen Christ. And in Christ, all will be made alive.

You no longer have death, eternal condemnation, waiting to happen. You have life waiting to be lived, now in this old creation and fully in the new creation.

Death hurts. Death separates you from the people you love. We must recognize that and better understand the hurt it causes. But death is a blot on God's good creation which, sure, let's despise death. But do not fear it. Do not fear it for death has been conquered. Death will be undone. In Christ will all be made alive.

So was there something else in Romero's and Bonhoffer's and the Martyrs' goal in mind that moves to do what they did other than social justice? Absolutely, the sheer hope of the resurrection and life eternal with Christ. Sure, there has been so many that died for an ideal, especially the ideal of improving the freedom and justice for many, but still no eternal hope. But in those who held on, and hold on to their Faith in Christ, do so because of the power of the Gospel, so they didn't fear death. Paul didn't fear death either. He didn't have to fear death when he faced the wild beasts or those persecuting him. because we don't fear death, is what moves you to say at your confirmation, "I am ready to suffer anything, even death, rather than compromise this confession of faith."

That's why we stand against social injustice. That's why we can love our enemies instead of hating them. Like Joseph did. His brothers sold him into slavery. But Joseph did not hold it against them. He believed in the God who uses evil to accomplish good, who uses the evil of death as the gate to life with him. We are in Christ. Even if they kill you for being a Christian, you won't stay dead. Not permanently.

Maybe that's why in, 1 Corinthians 15, Paul does not say the bodies of believers are buried. He says they're planted, "sown" (v 42). Maybe we've been using the wrong word. We talk about burying Christian bodies. Maybe we should join Paul in saying we plant them. Because when you bury something, you put it in the ground and expect it to stay there. But when you plant something, you put it in the ground and expect it to come out again. We plant the bodies of baptized believers in Christ in their tombs. And one day they will flourish again, better, renewed full of life. And more, that's why we do not need to fear living for Christ or dying for Christ.

It's true that in Adam all die, but in Christ the Second Adam we shall all be made alive. Amen.