

In two and half years here I didn't have one funeral. I'm not complaining. I'm pretty sure you would agree that not having funerals is a good thing. In the last three months I will have had three. Again I'm not complaining. It's a privilege to serve the individual as Jesus ushers them from this life into eternal life. It's also a privilege to serve the family in a time of grief mixed with joy. But one thing about every funeral, no matter if you're the pastor, the family, or a friend you never get used to seeing a dead body.

Maybe more than anything else seeing a dead body in a casket or laying on a hospital bed reminds us that one day that's going to be me. One day I'll draw my last breath. One day I'll see loved ones and then I won't anymore. You might be the one who is just afraid of being dead. A time when this living breathing body is no more. For some it's a paralyzing fear of loss of control. For others it's a curious fear of the unknown. For most it's a fear to avoid. You might be getting uncomfortable just from me talking about it right now.

As we walk with Jesus during this season of Lent we're reminded that his body experienced death. He promised it last week when he said that he would be mocked, flogged, and crucified. Jesus or the apostle Paul don't leave us with that thought though. There's more to the story of Jesus. The second lesson from his letter to the Romans sheds light on the future. We can have...

Freedom from the fear of death
Promised a bodily resurrection
Promised future glory

Both ways of treating a body after death, cremation or burial, recognize that the body is no longer needed. This leads some to the conclusion that if the body is worthless after death it is before. And that's one fear of death, the fear that your time with the one and only body you've ever known is over. Paul corrects that notion, **"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you."** Notice two things, one the way Paul just states that Jesus was raised. That's important. Jesus who died on the cross and whose body was laid in the tomb was brought back to life. The second point is the way Paul says "if the Spirit is living in you". There's really not any "if" about it. Paul is confident that Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is in you. Because that's true you're guaranteed what happened for Jesus will happen for you. Your body will be raised to life again too.

Participating in a resurrection means this body has worth. It means we're obligated to something, but not to the sinful nature. We often live like we are obligated to the sinful nature though. We live to please it with a steady diet of sinful activity. Some claim to be Christian but live as open liars, drunks, and cheats. They're deceiving themselves. They don't have sin under control; sin has them under control. **"If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die."** Follow sin and you'll die, physically and eternally.

It will happen again this year that we'll see Jesus go face to face with sin and death. He'll stand toe to toe with Satan and his evil angels on the cross. And the great promise is that he'll win. Jesus defeats sin and death. He was raised to life again. The one who claimed to Martha to be **"the resurrection and the life,"** said **"He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."** Do you believe him? He's making promises about your bodily resurrection and eternal life. Whether we're cremated, buried, or something else after we die physically won't matter. Jesus promises that he'll return and restore our bodies and raise us from the dead. We'll live again in eternity.

So we're obligated to God. His promise of a bodily resurrection means we live to serve him. **"By the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live."** This isn't a crushing weight of burden or obligation. It's more like the loving obligation of a husband to his wife. Yes it's an obligation, but it's one he does out of love and tenderness to his bride. He wouldn't want it any other way. God the Holy Spirit dwells within us so we're given the strength to fight against temptations. We combat them and put them to death like some weed that has infested our lawn. Kill the sin. Connect with the Spirit, grow in faith, and become pure in Christ.

An heir shares in everything of the family. They share in the blessings of what they'll inherit some day. But they also share in the suffering to accumulate that inheritance. They share in the suffering if everything is lost in a fire. The family's tragedy is the heir's tragedy too. So too in God's kingdom. We've been made heirs of God with the rights of sons and co-heirs with Christ. Being co-heirs means we'll receive the same glorious resurrection he did. We'll be raised bodily on the Last Day. But it also means we share in what Christ did here on earth. We share in sufferings in order to be promised future glory.

I'd like to say there was no suffering in the last three individuals who have died from our congregation, but I can't. The cancer in each caused pains they didn't share verbally. But you saw it on their faces. You heard it in the strained words. Any future glory was hidden and it made it hard. Hard to share that the pain and suffering now was something good or that it would be forgotten in the future. While they each understood, a part of them wanted that glory now. We do too. With the constant threat of war, government shutdown, or crime, all the disease spreading across the face of this planet, the children aborted before birth, and the car crash victims we see on the news and experience in our own lives this pile of suffering threatens to overwhelm us. Every day we ask ourselves how will I cope today?

Now listen as Paul tells you suffering has a goal. **“We are heirs, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”** Your faces didn’t light up when Paul said you would suffer. But the suffering is proof you’re heirs of Christ. You share in his suffering. That’s proof you’ll share in his glory as well. Your hope in suffering is that Jesus suffered too. His resurrection was his future glory. So now you wait, already guaranteed and promised a resurrection, and future glory. It’s yours today. When you suffer, that’s your proof.

How we handle suffering says a lot about us, how we deal with trouble, handle the hurt, and cope with death. But Paul says to do this; take all the suffering you’ve ever endured, all the death you’ve seen, all the sickness you’ve felt, all the hurt people have done to you and put it on one side of a giant scale. Then look to the other side of the scale. See your future glory, the streets of the perfect heaven, the loved ones already waiting, your Savior standing at the center of the throne. That’s your future glory. **“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”** There’s no comparison. The scale is tipped completely towards the glory Christ grants by grace which far outweighs any suffering now.

We’ll admit we’re a little afraid of death. We don’t understand it and we like to understand things. We spend so much time focused on the loss and the pain. This is where our fear of death comes from. Christ Jesus sets us free with a promise of our own bodily resurrection just like his. He sets us free with a promise of future glory just like his. We face our suffering and we face our death with eyes firmly planted on the cross of Christ and even more on the empty tomb. With that as our hope we won’t fail to be free from the fear of death.