Wednesday Morning Service, 12th May 2021

**Readings:** Psalm 98, 1 Corinthians 15.35-50

**Reflection**

For a whole chapter Paul has been deconstructing the false teaching of those who have been declaring that there was no resurrection from the dead. But Paul is ready to respond to anyone who asks him the questions: How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come? This week’s section of text bluntly raises and addresses these questions that the Corinthians must have been dealing with. Paul tells them very quickly how foolish it is to asks these questions. The Corinthians are trying to catch Paul out, they may not have been expecting much of a response form Paul, maybe believing that Paul would not be able to answer these questions. They wanted to discredit Paul and prove him wrong. However, Paul being Paul, was prepared. He was prepared with a very good and thought through response to prove them otherwise. Paul did not want anyone left believing this false teaching against the resurrection. He was not going down without a fight.

Paul was a very passionate man and really wanted people to get the good news, to understand it and not try and discredit it. He was on a mission to make sure that these questions were answered clearly and correctly. But why? Why is this important to Paul, and why is this important for us?

Maybe because Paul is convinced that the believers will be transformed as Christ has been transformed. Paul can make this bold claim because he has seen the resurrected Christ(15:8-11). That one revelation, that one moment that he had with the risen Jesus changed everything. It changed the course of Paul’s whole life. That one moment caused him to see God’s transformative resurrection power invading life as he knew it. If Christ has not been raised, then that revelation is a lie. If Christ has not been raised, then this good news offers no more hope than any other religion or idea.

So, Paul addresses these questions by firstly, relating the seed and plant to the human body (v36-37). When we die, he tells us that our bodies are sown (buried) to corruption. In other words, our bodies begin to decay, even as a seed planted in the ground begins to decay as it prepares to give birth to a new plant. But that decay isn’t the end of the story, but the beginning. The body which was sown in corruption is raised in incorruption, no longer subject to decay. It can be understood like this….Imagine that Paul has been saying to the Christians in Corinth, “You’re going to be like flowers.” And then they’ve said to Paul, “Are these flowers going to be flat and green, like a pumpkin seed? Or black and white striped, like a sunflower seed? Or little tiny black specks, like a poppy seed?” And Paul is saying “No, you’re missing the point. You’re not going to be seeds, you’re going to be flowers!” They are focusing on the things that are being buried, the body/ seed and missing the point that when they are resurrected they will not be a seed but a flower. The beauty and the miracle is in what has been raised and not what has been buried. Do we focus too much on the physical here and now and forget about what is to come?

But why were the Corinthians so against this idea of boldly resurrection. The Corinthians’ disapproval to the belief in the resurrection seems to come from their disgust of a dead body. If this God insists on raising dead bodies (and God does), what will those bodies be like? We can’t blame the Corinthians for being disgusted by the thought of a dead body being raised. Jews would have been taught that the dead are unclean and if anyone would go near and touch a dead body, they would also be made unclean (Numbers 19:11). Also, in Paul’s day, someones body would not have necessary been very healthy. No access to healthcare, or good nutrition, people with various disabilities and ill-heath, would have been very normal. They didn’t expect to live a long and healthy life, so it is understandable why they would want to be far removed from this idea of the same body being raised from the dead. Maybe they were disappointed when they thought they would have to keep the body that they had, hoping to one day escape from it. I always imagine having longer legs when I have a new body but I don’t think this is what Paul is teaching us. What Paul was trying to teach them and tell them was not that a zombie apocalypse would be happening but he was giving them good news, the good news of transformation. We have heard from Paul on Christ’s resurrection, now it’s time to hear about ours.

So, what does Paul tell us about this transformation, the bodily transformation. He tells us that this body which is perishable will be raised imperishable, this body which is dishonourable will be raised in glory, this body which is weak will be raised in power and this body that is natural will be raised a spiritual body (v42-44). Everything they thought about the body was now transformed. This untouchable, sinful, broken body will be transformed. Knowing how they felt about a decaying body, this idea of Paul’s must have shaken people up. How does this idea make you feel?

Whether they were with Paul or against him, Paul was not holding back. He dares to imagine a transformed body. He wants to point out to his listeners and wants them to get that when we are raised with Christ in bodily form this body is going to be transformed, glorious, whole, but it will be a recognisable body. Paul is saying that this body, flesh and blood, which was once corrupted by sin will be transformed to reflect the blessing of abundant life that God always wanted for his creation. Jumping back to verse 38, Paul reminds us that it is God who gives us this body, this life, this transformation. Unfortunately, I don’t think we get to choose this body, I don’t think I will be allowed to ask for longer legs, no matter how much I want to be taller. This should be good news to the Corinthians, that God, the God who is for us and loves us is the one who is involved in transforming us. This is the hope we have to come. That God will one day transform us, beyond our imagination, even beyond Paul’s imagination.

When we think of this, our bodies being imperishable, powerful and glorifying to God, how does that make us feel? Knowing that one day we will be reconciled to God and will be glorious, honourable and sin free. We can read this part of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians and be filled with the hope, knowing that when we are raised with Christ our bodies will be transformed, our minds will be transformed, we will be transformed. This isn’t to say that while we are here on earth we can do what we want with out bodies and minds. Paul tells us in Romans 12.1-2 that we need to offer our bodies to God as a living sacrifice, pleasing to God, and to not conform to this world but be transformed by the renewing of our minds. God has given us these bodies, and yes one day he will transform them, but for now we have to look after our bodies and minds, making them pleasing to him.

What do we feel like God is saying to us through these verses from Paul? When we are feeling hopeless do these verse fill us with hope, the hope of what it is to come? How can we look after our bodies and minds and what does this look like?

**Collect- 6th Sunday of Easter**

Risen Christ,

by the lakeside you renewed your call to your disciples:

help your Church to obey your command

and draw the nations to the fire of your love,

to the glory of God the Father.

**Prayers**

* Prayer for roads in our parish. Pray for the parish of Bourne End, especially for all who live and work in Pouchen End Lane and the Canal. For those in the Sunnyside parish, especially for those who live and work in Townsend Gate and Little Heath Road.
* Let us continue to pray for those in India and other countries who are struggling with the rapid spread of COVID.
* Pray for those who are struggling with their physical or mental health. Thinking of those who are becoming more anxious as we are easing out of lockdown.
* Keep praying for the NHS and all who are working so hard to roll out the vaccine.
* Pray for those who are lonely, isolated and vulnerable.
* Pray for all the business that have reopened, the financial pressures and struggles that they have and are facing.
* Pray for our countries leaders and the leaders of the church. As we ease out of lockdown that they will be wise in the decisions made.
* Pray for all those who are persecuted for their faith and can loose their freedom and life for following Christ.