

*Unlocking Scripture: The Apostles' Creed, Pt. 14*  
***The Resurrection of the Body***  
*I Corinthians 15: 35-49*

**First Presbyterian Church  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**November 17, AD 2019  
Gerrit Scott Dawson**

---



Richie Havens was a minor recording artist in the 1960's who catapulted to fame when he opened Woodstock 50 years ago. Richie wasn't supposed to be up first, but the traffic generated by 400,000 people pouring into Yasgur's farm in the rural Catskills also kept most of the musicians from getting there. Richie had flown in by Army helicopter from New York City. Richie recalls that he played every song he knew and still no other musicians had arrived. So he made up one of his most famous songs, "Freedom," on the spot. I bring up Richie Havens this morning because one of his recent recordings so powerfully connects me to our final phrases in the Apostles' Creed: I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

The poignant yearning in Richie's soulful voice pierces me in the song "The Long Road." It's a song of loss, grief and the yearning that loves sundered in this world will continue somewhere down the long road. So he sings to his departed,

I can hear your voice in the wind.  
Are you calling to me?  
Down this long road?  
Do you really think there's an end?  
I will live my whole life down this long road.

Isn't that the question raised when we consider death and resurrection? Do you really think there's an end? I listen to that song and my heart cries out an answer, "No! No, I don't think there's an end! We go on. I will live my whole life down the long road of this hope."

There's a prayer I love from the Episcopal funeral services. It is so strong, however, that I almost never have the courage to use it where it was intended, by a casket. I call it the Nose-Dive prayer. Because this prayer is like an airplane that suddenly stalls and then dives, nose first, toward oblivion. Hear a bit of this, and listen for how even the cadence of the words goes down, down, down.

You only are immortal, the creator and maker of mankind;  
 and we are mortal, formed of the earth,  
 and unto earth shall we return.  
 For so you did ordain when you created me, saying,  
 "You are dust, and to dust you shall return."  
 All we go down to the dust;  
 Yet even at the grave we make our song:  
 Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.



It's almost too much to say to the grieving. We are mortal. Unto earth we return.

We are dust. We all go down to the dust. The plane is diving into despair. Do you really think there's an end? Yes, I know there's an end and it's the ground as this plane is going down. But then, at the last second, the pilot pulls up mightily

on the throttle.



It's that one word, *Yet*. All we go down to the dust, *yet*. He takes control of the plane. The nose starts to come up. Yet even at the grave we make our song. Even here, looking into the teeth of death, we will sing alleluia. What could possibly turn this diving plane back skywards? What power can transform the dive into death we are all taking? Only the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. As we grab the throttle of faith, we are leaning back with all our weight and all our might to pull that plane up.

the resurrection of Jesus

We are leaning on Jesus' rising. Only that event can endure the plunge towards the dust and decay. The stone rolls back and the mightiest shout of that tiny word *Yet* upends the universe. Yet even at the grave we make our song, Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.



Jesus is risen. All our hope is coordinated with what happened to Jesus. For as we have seen throughout this series, Jesus is the man for every man, woman and child. What he is as a human being is a gift for all who will entrust their lives to him. Jesus promises, "Because I live, you also will live (Jn. 14:19). And Paul assures us that Jesus "will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:20). What Jesus has we will have. A resurrected body, outfitted for eternal life. With the rest of our time this morning, let's consider what it means that we have hope in sharing Jesus' embodied, everlasting life.

**1) The Same, Yet Different.** In our passage this morning, Paul uses the picture of a seed and a fully grown plant. He compares our earthly bodies to the seed and our resurrected, heavenly bodies to the fully grown plant. They are the same, but different. Now the seed of a sunflower is genetically complete. All the information is there for a full grown plant. But it's not yet that plant. The sunflower seed has to be planted (not eaten by people trying to give up chips). In a sense, the seed dies. The hard shell falls away and is no more. But then the tender shoot of the plant springs up until it becomes the vivid yellow, dancing, waving sunflower.



A more dramatic comparison can be made using the caterpillar and the butterfly. The monarch caterpillar is a very hungry, yet genetically complete insect. All its information is in its cells. But at the proper time, the caterpillar finds a safe spot and sheds its skin, revealing the chrysalis below. The chrysalis hardens on the outside while inside the caterpillar is undergoing a metamorphosis. Inside the chrysalis, the caterpillar has liquefied. If you broke the chrysalis open, you wouldn't find a caterpillar; you'd find gooey green stuff. This re-forms into the winged butterfly. Each stage, the genetic information of the creature is the same. It's the same insect. But different. Most of us would feel that the new form is more glorious to behold than the old caterpillar, and certainly much less destructive.

So, too, with our resurrection bodies. We will be the same. But different. As different as a caterpillar which can only crawl is from the butterfly who can soar. This tells us something very important:

## 2) God Loves Your DNA!

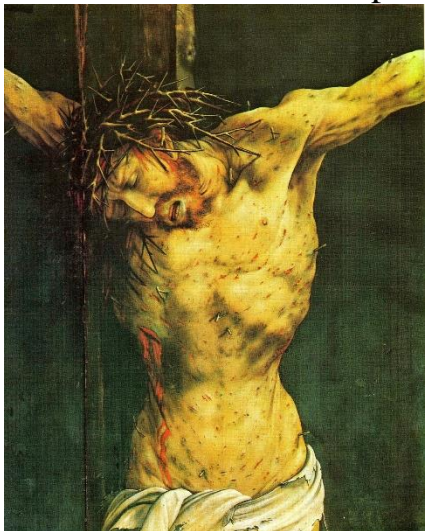


God is the Creator. He could easily let you be annihilated and bring something else into existence that will last longer and be able to do more. But he doesn't. He loves *your* DNA. He loves the information that makes you, you! We all return to the dust. But that is not the end of us. Classically, we say that the spirit of a person lives on after the body has died. Whatever else that means, we can understand that the essential information that makes us who we are continues after its expression in these earthly bodies ends. In the goo phase between caterpillar and butterfly, the creature's information all lives on. So, too, in the time between earthly death and the resurrection of the last day, our spirits live on in God. Our information is safely kept for the great remaking.

For God does not want to be done with you. He doesn't want to get rid of you as you. He loves the you that he made. Right now, you suffer with the reality that we all age. We all decay. Our cells get invaded by hostile cells and we get sick. Sometimes the information in our cells gets corrupted and we have disabilities. But that does not deter God's love, nor our future. He made us to go on, down the long road, in communion with him and one another.

And who knows how something we look at today as a defect in our earthly bodies might be seen to be a glorious prize in the resurrection? Perhaps these blemishes that embarrass us will turn out to be wonderful beauty marks. Who can even imagine such glory? But we know this: when the fog of this life is lifted, we will perceive more clearly than ever how much our Creator treasures us. He loves the DNA that makes you, you.

**3) The Body Keeps the Score.** Now I want to turn us a bit to consider what difference the resurrection makes right now. The Jesus who rose from the dead was not a man who had died peacefully in his sleep.



Matthias Grunewald's famous Isenheim altarpiece from 1515 takes us offensively close to the horror. It's the artistic equivalent of the nose-dive prayer. Seeing Jesus scored, serrated, shamed and scorned, I feel that Grunewald has gone past the point of any possible redemption.

And that's his gift to us. For we have been so sorely used and cruelly shamed in this hard world. I have been wondering what belief in the resurrection of the body has to say to those who bear in their bodies the lasting imprint of harm done. Those who have been mugged. Knocked around. Violated. Basic boundaries breached. Used. Sold. Discarded. Those who have cut themselves, starved themselves, and banged their heads against the wall until they were unconscious. Those who have liquefied their livers with drink or demented their thinking capacity with drugs. Those with gaps in their minds and scars on their skin. We can see ourselves in this painting and know that Christ has been there.

Psychologist Bessel Van Der Kolk writes of the effects of trauma in her book, *The Body Keeps the Score*:

We have learned that trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body.

Traumatized people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies: The past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort. Their bodies are constantly bombarded by visceral warning signs.... Being frightened means that you live in a body that is always on guard. Angry people live in angry bodies. The bodies of child-abuse victims are tense and defensive until they find a way to relax and feel safe.

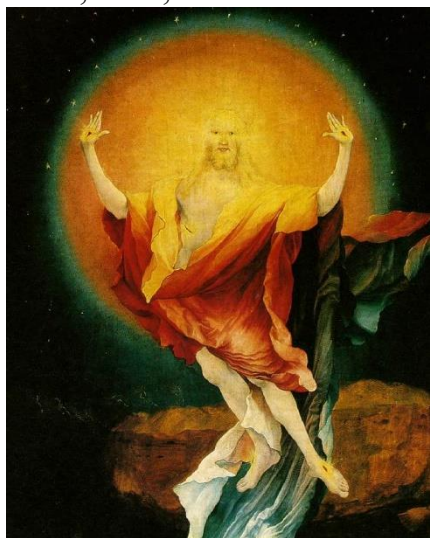
Looking at Grunewald's crucifixion, we certainly feel the trauma in Jesus' body. It has led to the total numbness of death. So Van Der Kolk adds,

In an attempt to control these processes, trauma victims often become expert at ignoring their gut feelings and in numbing awareness of what is played out inside. They learn to hide from their selves... What we witnessed here was a tragic adaptation: in an effort to shut off terrifying sensations, they also deadened their capacity to feel fully alive.... Trauma victims cannot recover until they become familiar with and befriend the sensations in their bodies.

People in trauma require a resurrection back into the world where we can feel, integrate, process and relate to others:

In order to change, people need to become aware of their sensations and the way that their bodies interact with the world around them. Physical self-awareness is the first step in releasing the tyranny of the past.<sup>1</sup>

Here, then, is where Grunewald's Resurrection is so powerful.



You open the altar panel and go from crucifixion to resurrection. Shining, soaring, feeling, triumphant. As a church father said, "The glory of God is man fully alive." And here is Jesus, traumatized by shame and violence now restored to life.

This is certainly hope for our future. Resurrection is coming. And hope energizes. Perhaps you can feel it when you look at Grunewald's painting. I want life that radiates with such energy and light. Van Der Kolk's book<sup>7</sup> also leads us to hope. She says, "our capacity to destroy one another is matched by our capacity to heal one another. Restoring relationships and community is central to restoring well-being..." We can learn to feel again. We

can trust that we are loved again. We can come to life again. Yes, in heaven. But also right now.

How badly we need to be sustained by the Lord's Supper again and again. To receive from the Holy Spirit communion with the crucified Lord who has taken our shame as his own in the trauma of his passion. To commune with the resurrected Jesus who has transformed our broken humanity into glorious everlasting life. To do this together, where we are one body with each other, sharing each other's woes, sharing each other's joys, sharing each other's journeys. We can help each other befriend the body, no matter how used, bruised, tainted or discarded it has been. For we step together into the sacred story when we worship. And we remind each other in every hug, every prayer and every sharing that God loves the DNA of each one of us. He will not let us go out of existence. He will transform us. The same, yet different. Healed. Restored. And that all begins right now.

Richie Havens sang the question that stirs my soul: do you really think there's an end? No, Richie, I don't think there's an end. I know there's not an end. Jesus has pulled us out of the nose dive into dust and oblivion. I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

---

<sup>1</sup>Quotations from Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score*, accessed at: <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/26542319-the-body-keeps-the-score-brain-mind-and-body-in-the-healing-of-trauma>