

**Sermon**  
**The Resurrection Question**  
**Weatherly Heights Baptist Church**  
**Communion Sunday**  
**August 2, 2009**

Texts

Job 14:14, “If mortals die, will they live again?”

Luke 22:19, “Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

I Cor 11:24, “and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’”

I Cor 15:55, “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

Good morning.

Death has many agents—mobs that cry “Crucify him!,” war, physical laws of the universe which mandate without any appeal that if you are slammed into by a car traveling at 60 miles an hour while you are standing still you will die. The list of the agents of death is endless. Cancer. The list is endless.

The issue of how long is the list of the agents of death is not crucial to us. The issue that is crucial, the question we struggle with in the midnight hour of our souls, is “Does death have the last word?” Job raised the question. Jesus and Luke raised the question. Paul raised the question. The death question. Does death have the last word?

I am obsessed with the question right now. I am desperate to know whether the after life I’ve heard about as long as I can remember is true or a delusion meant to comfort people like me trying to face up to the next thirty years. I am desperate to know exactly where Leigh Anna is, exactly in what state she is. For me, right now, the question about Leigh Anna and Tad is agonizingly abstract, agonizingly inscrutable, and agonizingly imprecise. It is an agonizing, abstract question with agonizingly abstract answers.

What I need is a question to which there is a concrete answer. And so I turn the question to its flip side, to the question Job and Paul raised—the resurrection question. And I find that the flip side question—the resurrection question—has an answer that, for me, is concrete, knowable, and precise. And as it was for Job and Jesus and Luke and Paul—part of the answer to the resurrection question—can we live again—is found in that which we celebrate this morning—communion.

Or to put it better, I think, communal union.

Does death have the last word? Or can we live again? It occurs to me that Jesus gathered the disciples around him for one final pre-crucifixion meal in part because he was in the midnight hour of his soul. It occurs to me that in this particular moment, Jesus was gathering strength, not from the promises of God, not from the church universal, but from his intimate group, his soul mates so that, like me, he could face a future he did not want to face. “Let this cup pass,” he said later. And for him these old companions were the answer to the question. They had all been in communal union; they were part of him. He needed to know they cared about him; he needed to know they would remember him. And so, he asked them to remember him with small, but important concrete actions—not with abstract theological conclusions. Later on, he said, will you gather together and talk about me? Later on? Would you do the things we used to enjoy? Would you eat bread again? Would you drink wine again? Don’t forget me.

The Bible says that only one person, Paul, quoted Jesus’ words, “Do this in remembrance of me.” And I think it is significant that Paul was also facing an inevitably violent death given his theological politics that chafed at the Roman authorities—the Roman authorities who had announced in three languages that when it came to the death question they had the last word. And what Paul wanted to proclaim more than anything else was the certainty that when God resurrected Jesus, God defiantly announced to the Roman authorities that God has the last word over death, not they.

Paul was profoundly aware that how the church at Corinth behaved—whether the members were in communal union or individuals divided—was as important to the future of the resurrection question as any individual’s abstract theological conclusion. Would Jesus’ resurrection continue to be proclaimed and be the church’s foundation? Or would it pass away from human memory because the group at Corinth couldn’t get its act together? Would death have the last word? Or would mortals die but live again?

Job had his reasons for raising the resurrection question. Jesus had his. So did Luke and Paul. And I have mine. I’ll be searching for a long time for the answer to the ultimate resurrection question when it comes to Leigh Anna and Tad. But I want to put aside the question of Tad and Leigh Anna’s resurrection, just for now, and talk about my own. Because I have experienced it. And I want to tell you about it.

Just before midnight on April 17, my life was knocked out of me. Before I even reached the scene of the accident, I turned into a zombie. And I choose that word carefully. I became one of the living dead. I could still breathe. I could still talk. But I was an impersonator of the woman I had been only minutes earlier. And later on, at the house waiting for Whitney and Jim to arrive, I got up and without saying anything to anyone I went upstairs, not to cry, but to lie down and stare at nothing. And I felt like I’d never have the strength to move again—to live again. And I laid there for a long time, I think.

At some point, around 2 o'clock in the morning, I heard the front door opening and Whitney crying the most horrible cries and immediately I got up. I knew without even thinking about it that Whitney could not be victorious over Leigh Anna's death if I could not because what happens to me happens to her.

And so I began what for a very brief while felt like a solitary self-propelled quasi-resurrection. But I was wrong. My full resurrection had begun before that door opened and I heard Whitney's cries.

Because hours earlier, many teenagers and adults had begun to get the news and had begun texting one another hoping that there had been some mistake. And so no one wanted to call us before they were certain. But Olivia and we have been in communion for a long time and Olivia understood that we had to be given the news and she mustered up great courage and called us to let us know there had been a terrible wreck and a fire and that Leigh Anna had been hurt.

And after we returned from the scene of the accident and we understood that Leigh Anna and Tad had died, Abigail, who has been in communion with us for a long time, was sitting on the front porch. And later on Jana, who had been searching frantically for Leigh Anna at the hospital, arrived followed by Bodo and so many others with whom we have been in communion for a long time. And Charlene stayed up all night cooking so that she and Steven could be at the front door by 7 o'clock the next morning with breakfast.

So when I went upstairs to lie down and stare like a zombie you were already there, in profound communion with Al and Jim and Whitney and me, surrounding us, pulling us back to life again, encouraging our resurrections.

We all have a strong communal union here. A union that is so profound that some of you even stepped in to experience what I could not. At the scene of the accident, Kelly wretched, violently, just as if Leigh Anna had been her child. And Eunice, who had come to the hospital to celebrate the day Leigh Anna was born, drove through the night from Atlanta to wail with me and for me and as me in the death of "my baby," "my baby." And while I was silent, Yvonne said that Leigh Anna's death was the worst thing that had ever happened to her.

And bit by bit Olivia and Abigail and Jana and Bodo and Charlene and Steven and Kelly and Eunice and Yvonne and so many others of you pulled me back from death and pushed me just a bit farther again into life.

And when Mitch gave me a wooden bracelet he had made he pulled me back just a little bit farther. And when Pat knitted a prayer shawl for Whitney and R. G. called her so many times, they pulled me back just a bit more. And when Dan and David arranged bike rides for Al they pulled me back just a bit more. And when Joyce and Jan and Norma came by after church and drank a glass of wine with us and laughed at nothing they pulled me back just a little bit more. And when Dean said he needed your patience while he grieved he pulled me back just a little bit more. And when Kim said she decided to get her family a tiny, bouncy dog named Leigh2 Bear to help fill the void in her home left by a tiny, bouncy girl she helped pull me back just a little bit more.

And one of the most encouraging of my resurrection moments was the Sunday a few weeks ago when Elsie brought me a grocery bag filled with tomatoes out of her garden as she has for years. And the following Sunday I gave her a tin of homemade chocolate chip cookies as I have for years. Life goes on. My life goes on.

I started down a dangerous path with all this naming of names. I didn't even mention Marvin and Claire and Ben and Linder and Jim and Rick and the choir and the Wednesday night group. The list of the agents of my resurrection is endless. Pat at my door with her first roses. The list is endless.

So, in a few minutes, when we share symbolic bread and drink symbolic wine, I'll celebrate the resurrected Lord, to be sure. But mostly, this morning, I'll celebrate the resurrected me. And I'll celebrate that, because of this powerful communal union we have, I am able to say as defiantly as Paul, "Where, O death, is your victory now? Where O death, is your sting?"