

It's All Saints Day and we turn our attention to God's promise of eternal life. This can be a wonderful thought, but it also raises some questions. The Rev. Jeff Hedin, pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Pittsford, jokes about what do we mean in the creeds when we talk about the resurrection of the body; because he doesn't want to be resurrected in his current body! As a teenager in high school he was a football player and wrestling star. Apparently he was quite a specimen of up and coming manhood. But now retirement is approaching and that body is long gone. He's developing some vision problems. He fell off a ladder some years ago and seriously injured his spine. And as we joke, there's the simple reality that he traded in his "six-pack abs" for a keg. He says if his body's got to come back for eternity he wants the 18 year old version, plus some improvements; certainly not the 60+ year old version!

We all know this is a silly line of thought. In 1 Corinthians 15:35 Paul writes, "But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body to they come?' Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it

a body as he has chosen." And he goes on. I think this is a mystery our minds simply cannot imagine. But it is promised to be good.

Other questions come up too. Our second reading from Revelation uses apocalyptic imagery to describe things. Like all apocalyptic thought it isn't to be taken literally, but it does raise some important issues.

Perhaps along with what kind of body will we have is also the question, what will we do forever? You've heard me say before that the idea of sitting around on clouds in white robes playing harps forever and ever sounds more like hell to me than heaven!

While we may toil and suffer every day of our lives, and long for relaxation, won't that also become boring after a while? Maybe I'm odd in this regard, but while I like fun and entertainment, it doesn't replace the satisfaction of a job well done or an obstacle overcome. There is joy and a deep sense of purpose in toil.

My one great aunt is in her early 90's and living in a retirement community. She is in decent health, although she is

slowing down a lot. She has more money that she could possibly ever spend. These days her life is nothing but rest and relaxation, and as much indulgence as she could ever want; the ultimate retirement, but she is bored and sees no purpose to her existence.

It seems as if the only way to ongoing happiness in this earthly life is to work. But I don't want to work forever either.

Let's look at the vision in Revelation 21. The scene we are invited to imagine is a new city of Jerusalem coming down out of the sky. It is prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. Remember, in those days Jews considered the city of Jerusalem to be the center of the universe - everything revolved around it. And while they believed God was omnipresent - that is, present everywhere - God was most strongly present in the temple of Jerusalem, God's dwelling place.

Our verses don't cover this detail, but later in the chapter we learn that this new Jerusalem has no temple building. Instead, God's own presence is the temple. Our verses say, "See the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as

their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them..."

If you were here last week you'll remember we looked at the two creation accounts in Genesis. There was so much to cover that we didn't really even begin to look at what they actually meant. But let's pull out a couple things now. The Adam and Eve story starts out with Adam and Eve getting to be in close relationship with God. God walks with them in the Garden of Eden. But then of course they mess up and get kicked out. The close full relationship with God is ended. However you want to understand that teaching, here in Revelation it talks about that being restored. In eternal life there will be no breach between God and people.

Reality will be that nothing can separate us from God. Our Revelation text says, "God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more."

If you can imagine that scene can you get a sense of God's sadness too? God knows his people hurt and suffer; and that suffering is real. God does not want that for his people. Why

God allows hurt to continue is beyond what I can understand.
But I can understand that it bothers God too.

But of course eternal life will not be about God wiping away tears from earthly hurts forever and ever. After all, that would get boring too. Let's look back at those Genesis accounts again. In Genesis 1 we have this grand and majestic poem talking about God's work of creation. You'll remember that every time God speaks things immediately happen. The words are, "And God said, let there be..." And a couple verses later we find the words, "And it was so."

That text isn't so interested in giving what we could call a scientific account of the origin of the universe as it is interested in giving a faith account origin of the universe. It teaches that what is was created by God - not by accident, but by conscious choice. It teaches that God gradually brings the primordial chaos of nature into greater and greater order, human beings being the high point of order. It also teaches that God's power is creative.

And so what does that mean for our reading of Revelation today, and what it suggests for eternal life? It suggests that to dwell forever more with God is to dwell with God's infinite

power to create. God loves to create. And God invites us to be with him in creativity. The final verse of our second reading says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life."

Notice it does not say, "I will maintain you forever in the stagnant cesspool of eternity." It says a gift of water from the spring of the water of life." It is a living, fresh, flowing dynamic image.

What will eternal life be like? I don't know. Our scripture suggests that it will be: dynamic, creative, energizing, worthwhile and fun.

We mourn the death of loved ones who are no longer with us in the pilgrimage of life. But we look forward to reunion with them. And not just reunion, but true completeness and wholeness sharing with God in God's infinitely great power to imagine and create. This is what our God wants for us. This is part of the good news of God that we are to share. And it is what we look forward to. Amen