

Trinity XXIV

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Preacher: Father Randall Russell

- [0 : 0 0] In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost. Amen. I was three years old when my grandfather died, and at the wake before his funeral, I remember being upset because everyone was talking so very loudly.
- For I had just seen my grandpa lying in the casket, taking what I thought at that time was a very, very long nap. And my grandmother always told me that when my grandpa is sleeping, you need to be quiet.
- But 16 years later, when my grandmother died, I had some very, very different thoughts. I took her death a lot harder because it felt more real.
- Grandma was gone. And if anyone asked me on that day where my grandmother was, I think I would have told them that she is up there in heaven.
- But 16 years prior, if anyone asked that three-year-old version of me where my grandfather was, I think I would have pointed to the casket and said, he's right there, sleeping.
- [1 : 2 5] So who's right? Three-year-old me back in 1983, or 19-year-old me back in 1999? For a very, very long time now, many Christians have tried to comfort those who have lost a loved one by telling them either explicitly or implicitly that their deceased loved ones are nothing more than their souls and not their bodies.
- And this well-meaning, but ultimately incorrect and unchristian view that the soul and not the body is all that matters has had some pretty devastating consequences to our culture.
- I believe this is part of the reason why so many in our culture today think that a person can transition from male to female or female to male or whatever else, because if the soul is all that matters, then who cares what happens to the body?
- And I believe this is also part of the reason why so many today think that taking care of our environment or our physical world doesn't really matter, because we should just all focus on more spiritual things, which when you think about it, really is just about the worst lesson on being a good steward of God's good gifts of creation that anyone could possibly learn.
- For our physical world matters, and so do our bodies. For God made human beings to have both a body as well as a soul.
- [3 : 2 0] For a human being without a human soul or a human body without a human soul is incomplete, just as a human soul without a human body is incomplete.
- For both are necessary, both are needed, in order for a human being to be whole. And yet death, death always has a way of robbing us of this great and glorious truth.
- Therefore, in this morning's gospel, Jesus tells a crowd who had come to mourn the death of a little girl, make room, for the girl is not dead, but is sleeping.
- And this morning's gospel tells us that the crowd's response was to ridicule him, or as it says in the old King James Version, and to laugh him to scorn.
- But why did they laugh? And why did they ridicule? Is it not because death has robbed them of any real understanding of the truth?

[4 : 31] For where was this little girl before Jesus raised her from the dead? Was she floating high above in the clouds of heaven?

Or was she simply lying upon her bed, just like my grandfather in his casket? What exactly was the reality of this little girl's situation before her resurrection?

And to be fair, our Lord doesn't really tell us. He doesn't say that she is now only a disembodied spirit.

And he doesn't say that she is now only dead. No. He instead describes that intermediate state between death and resurrection as sleep.

And in this way, acknowledges the wholeness of the human being, body and soul. Not that this little girl's soul was sleeping, and not that this little girl's body was simply taking a nap, but that in both body and soul, her entire person was simply waiting for the Lord to come and to wake her from the darkness of death.

[6 : 04] For Holy Scripture never describes a human being as just simply a soul or just simply a body, but always as a single being who possesses both.

For you are your body, and you are your soul. and yet you are not two, but one.

For what you do with your body, you also do with your soul. And what you do with your soul, you also do with your body. For it is the Lord's desire not just to care for one part of us, but to actually care for the entire person, which is why Jesus came to raise that little girl from the sleep of death, both body and soul, just as he will come again to raise all the faithful departed from the sleep of death, both body and soul, on the last day.

For that intermediate state between death and resurrection really is something that we know very little about.

And I think that's because it is something that our Lord really doesn't want us to focus upon all too much. Because that intermediate state is only one part of the story, only one part of salvation.

[7 : 45] In other words, it isn't the big picture. For whenever our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, talks about eternal life and salvation, he isn't talking about that intermediate state between death and resurrection.

and he isn't talking about what so many typically think of as heaven. No, he instead is talking about the entirety of the whole human experience being restored, both physically as well as spiritually.

For whenever our Lord talks about salvation, he talks about resurrection. resurrection. Therefore, to focus upon only one part of the story is also to be a part of the problem.

It would be like reciting the Apostles' Creed to someone and then just stopping with, and he descended into hell or Hades or Sheol and then not continuing.

But bad theology always has bad consequences. And I just gave a couple examples at the very beginning.

[9 : 06] But thanks be to God that Christ has come to show us the bigger picture. For after our Lord descended into the realm of death, both in body and soul, on the third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. For just as our Lord had done for that little girl, so will he do again for all those who have already fallen asleep in the faith.

For that intermediate state between death and resurrection that so, so many people obsess about, that intermediate state really is just a small part of a bigger story.

A greater day still awaits us all. Make room, Jesus says, for all those who have gone before us in the faith are not dead, but they are sleeping.

Yet one day the Lord will return to wake them all so that the entire family of God might be reunited in both body as well as soul.

[10 : 28] For that is what God has created us to be. A being that is not only spiritual, but physical as well. For in Christ Jesus, sin, death, and the devil cannot undo that which God has already created and always intended to be.

Not just disembodied spirits, but living, breathing, flesh and blood children of the one true God, just like Jesus on Easter morning.

and we get a small example of this with the raising of this little girl from the death. In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.