

Sermon given by my mother, Frances Fegley Phillips, or as she would more properly like to be known, Mrs. Ivan J. Phillips. The Methodist Church allows women to be preachers, or lay leaders.

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Good morning. It's a distinct pleasure to be here this morning as your lay speaker. I have butterflies in my stomach as usual, my knees are knocking, and if I fall off this stool I'm sitting on - we're all in trouble.

Strangely enough, the lay speakers course I took last fall never told us what to do about the butterflies. In fact we never once discussed the mechanics of making a good speech - they were much more concerned as to the state of our grace and whether or not we were "saved." I found this rather refreshing since being saved is not often talked about in some Methodist churches. Nevertheless the class was filled with 14 spirit-filled saved Christians - 3 of which were males and 11 females. One male, and one female were unable to finish the course. We felt the presence of the holy spirit at each of our sessions and I found the total experience very rewarding.

The homily for this morning is entitled,

"Is there life after death?"

We have all lost family members, friends, or acquaintances and continue to ask the age-old question, "Is there life after death? Or is this all there is?" Why do we ask it? Because deep in every man is a passion to live - a will to survive - tomorrow and beyond the grave. Our passion causes us to constantly search for the enduring meaning of life.

To begin our search we have to get beyond the biggest stumbling block of all - acceptance of our own death. I have a friend, a minister in New York, who used to head a tri-county hospice organization and he once told me - "no one really accepts their own death until about 15 minutes before it happens." There's that passion of ours to live. I think most of us accept death intellectually, but emotionally and spiritually it's another matter. I have a pet theory as to why our nation, our people are so caught up in this youth culture. Its because we're afraid of growing old. And age brings us closer to death.

Is there life after death? No one in our lifetime has died and come back to say "It's true!" I've never died and come back - have any of you? Of course, you haven't. I have to admit, however, that some days I look and feel like I've just come back from the dead. We've all heard or read of out-of-body experiences some claim to have undergone. They tell of looking down on others trying to resuscitate their bodies, or talk of floating to the ceiling and looking down at

themselves dead in bed; or walking in the street and no one sees them. Others have come out of comas saying they've been in a beautiful place and are anxious to go back - earth holds no attraction for them. There are many conflicting stories and no real way to check on them. The great escapist, Harry Houdini, vowed after his death he would if he could send us a message. There has been nothing but silence. People like Madeline Murray O'Hare say religion is nonsense and this is all there is baby so you'd better grab for everything while you're here. If this is so, man is no more than a beast who lives, reproduces and dies like all the others.

We know this is not so. Our answer is in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the resurrection is the promise of everlasting life to everyone who lives by faith, in the Son of God. It was God's answer to the age-old cry and what he has promised through Christ's resurrection he has the absolute power to perform.

But death seems so final you say. It appears to be the end of everything, and our souls are so bound up with our bodies its difficult to see how they can live on after our bodies pass away.

In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul describes our resurrection bodies. 1 COR 15: 35-50 New American Standard

"But someone will say, How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?

You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies;

And that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else.

But God gives it a body just as He Wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.

All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish.

There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another.

There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body;

it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;

it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

So also it is written, The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life giving spirit.

However, the spiritual is not the first, but the natural; then the spiritual.

The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven.

As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy, and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly,

And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

Now I say this brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

..For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality,

But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written "Oh Death where is Your Victory? Oh Death where is Your Sting?"

So we see Paul dealing with two common errors regarding the nature of the resurrection body. First, that it's the same body that was laid in the grave, simply re-formed and second that the new body is unrelated to the original one. Paul explains it is the body God has chosen, related to the former, yet different. When he speaks of an imperishable body he's talking of one with no possibility of decay. The phrase "we shall all bear the image of the heavenly" means our resurrection body will be like Christ's.

Jesus teaches of the resurrection and eternal life all through his ministry and in John 14: 2 and 3 he tells us "In my father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so I would have told you, for I go to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am, you may be also."

In Matt 22: 30 when asked will we be married in heaven, Jesus replied "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."

I can just hear some people saying "Thank God ! There's no sex in heaven." It's an interesting assumption, and very likely true. It is reasonable to assume, however, that a husband and wife who find themselves together in heaven will still love each other. But the love they have for each other will be a purer love

and on a much higher spiritual plane.

It is also reasonable to assume that God will not call us to an eternity of idleness - a mindless existence. Since he does not call us to laziness here on earth we can expect an eternity of creative adventure, one of peace and joy, free from suffering. We will be with loved ones and friends in a community of redeemed souls.

Is there life after death? The answer is "yes." The scriptures have told us what to expect and we have the promise of Christ's resurrection.

Remember, eternal life does not begin when we die, but starts now here on earth. God has given us responsibilities in this world and we must carry on his work in everything we do. In his preachings, our own John Wesley insisted that we are not redeemed by our good works, but can never be redeemed without them. What we do, how we live in this world, has a lot to do with what happens in the next one.

I have leaned heavily on scripture this morning because it is after all the ultimate authority. We can either accept it or reject it. As Christians, we accept it, in faith, believing. I accept it, do you?

Let us pray --

Grant to us, Lord, we beseech thee, the spirit to think and do always such things as are right; that we, who cannot do anything that is good without thee, may be enabled to live according to thy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Benediction

And now may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be among you and abide with you, now and evermore. Amen.