

HABEAS CORPUS

John 20:11-29

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Watch/Listen: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/habeas-corpus/

There is a Latin phrase which all the attorneys here this morning will know and hopefully, so will everyone who stayed away in civics class. *Habeas corpus*. It's a part of our legal system, to keep unjust leaders from hiding someone in jail without ever charging them with a crime. The phrase means "you shall have the body" or "produce the body." It's a basic reminder. Our bodies matter. As Dr. Thomas Long has pointed out, we don't say, "Old Joe is down in county lock-up, but don't worry; his spirit is still free." No, if Joe's body is in jail, Joe is in jail [*The Good Funeral*, p. 84].

Did you note that John's Gospel goes out of its way to stress Christ's physical resurrection? (the other three do as well). In fact, John's version is an enigma. Jesus can walk through walls, yet he has a body and takes up space and later eats. Thomas is invited to touch Jesus (v. 27), demonstrating Jesus is not just a spirit, a phantom or ghost, but is indeed physical. Over the years, the disciple Thomas has gotten a bum rap. He doubts, but what he is really saying is, "*habeas corpus*, produce the body..." It mattered to him and should matter to us.

To show you how counter-cultural this idea was, consider this. The Romans of Jesus' day followed Plato and the Greek line of thought: the body is a corrupt container imprisoning the pure soul. I had a seminary professor who explained it this way: The Greeks believed I have a soul; the Bible teaches I am a soul. In other words, All parts of my life matter. But that idea threatened the existing powers and order. In the year 177 AD, pagans in Lyon, France rounded up and butchered several Christians, including the bishop. According to the pagan doctor Galen, the Christ followers' belief in bodily resurrection infuriated the pagans [*Surprised by Hope*, N.T. Wright, p. 43]. You can see that this teaching would be considered dangerous to the Romans—that Lord Jesus demands our entire allegiance, our bodies (Romans 12:1-2).

Just like the Romans, we also have the bad habit of conveniently dividing the world into sacred and secular. Jesus' physical resurrection is a very inconvenient truth for people who want to split our world between secular and sacred. We don't have one realm that is God's (heaven/hell; Sunday mornings) and one that is all ours (hobbies, entertainment, relationships, our sexual lives, politics, our financial habits, moral choices). Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminded us that the resurrection is really a "this world" concept. It does not only answer the question about where I go when I die; it is about sending us back into the world, in a renewed way. Here is a good Easter rule of thumb—we are called to love this world while we hope for a better one [Long, p. 110].

Scripture teaches that we will have bodies like that of Jesus (Philippians 3:19-20). And begs the question: Will we know each other in the resurrection life? The logical answer is that in heaven, we surely will know more, not less. Mary Magdalene did not at first recognize Jesus, but then,

she probably wasn't expecting him! Somehow, he was the same, but different. I've read that as we shed cells, our bodies completely change every seven years. We recently updated my picture on the "pastor's wall," replacing a picture taken of me about 20 years ago. I think I've sluffed a few million cells! I'm different, but I'm the same me. Throughout his writings, the Apostle Paul stresses being clothed for eternity with "spiritual bodies," an oxymoron, bodies like our Risen Savior's. Not immortal souls, but resurrection bodies, wired for spiritual 220 (1 Cor 15:44; Philippians 3:19-20).

But bodily resurrection is deeper than questions of recognizing Great-Aunt Susie in the afterlife. It means that in raising His Son, God conquers disease, sickness and every enemy of life, that nothing is beyond God's power to repair and restore. Nothing is beyond the lordship of Christ. Because when Thomas insisted, "habeas corpus, produce the body," Jesus revealed himself, physically raised, his words were, "My Lord and my God" (v. 28). Yes, Jesus is alive and he wants to live through us and through our bodies.