# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“In Memoriam”**

**1 Corinthians 15:50-58**

 **May 30, 2021**

This morning we come to the end of our sermon series on encounters with the risen Christ. We have spoken together about some of the first century followers of Jesus, such as Mary, Thomas and Peter, and we have looked at the disciples’ interaction with Jesus as a group. This morning I want to move us forward about 2,000 years and have us consider some of the people that we know who through their passing from this life are encountering Jesus. These past fourteen months or so, during which we have been limited by COVID restrictions, several among our church family have died without us being able to memorialize them with a worship service. This morning I want us to remember them, to give witness to their faith and to ours, as we proclaim the hope we have in Christ Jesus of eternal life.

As I stand here on the chancel and look out upon the congregation, there are people missing from the pews. Over here was a dear lady, surrounded by friends, who is no longer with us. Over there I remember a man sitting with his wife. They held each other’s hands through most of the service, but he has gone to be with the Lord. And then there was the mother whose pew was filled by her nine children, a dear lady that we all miss. And there are members of our church choir and bell choir who will no longer share their musical talents with us. We loved and cherished them, each one, and we are grateful to God that he brought them into our fellowship, but death has taken them from us.

In times like these, when we remember those who have died, it is natural to ask questions about death - not only their death, but also our own. What happened to them when they died, and what will happen to us? Thankfully, the Word of God addresses the question and I invite you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

**50**I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. **51**Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— **52**in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. **53**For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. **54**When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” **55**“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” **56**The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. **57**But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. **58**Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Imagine if you will a young couple and their two-year-old son enjoying a day in the park. The little boy has been running around all morning chasing butterflies, throwing sticks for the family dog, looking for tadpoles in the little creek (closely supervised by dad), and climbing on the playground jungle gym. When he became hungry, his parents brought him back to their picnic blanket and he enjoyed some of his favorite foods that his mom had prepared for him. But, with a full tummy, he started feeling sleepy, so he curled up in his mother’s lap and soon he was fast asleep. Gently, his father gathered him in his arms, took him to the car, and fastened him, still sleeping, into his car seat. As they pulled into their driveway and his mom unbuckled him, he woke up and looked around. Smiling down into his sleepy face, mom said: “We’re home.”

What happens when we die? Paul uses the language of falling asleep, as did Jesus. At death, we fall asleep in the arms of Jesus, and when we wake up we will be at home in heaven. But, says Paul, the body in which we fall asleep is unfit for heaven. It is a mortal body, a perishable body, and it must be transformed into an immortal body, an imperishable body that can live forever with God and others in our new home.

When will this transformation take place? When the last trumpet is blown – that is, when Jesus Christ returns. There will come a day when Jesus will step out of eternity and back into history, when he will return to earth, and all who by faith have placed their trust in him will join him in the heavens. Not with our old, earthly bodies but with new transformed bodies.

Death is real. It has happened to people we love and it will happen to us. But death need not be feared, for it can no longer sting us with eternal separation from God, and it can no longer claim victory over God’s love for us. Yes, death is hard for loss is painful, and we experience that emotional pain this morning as we look around and are reminded of people who worshipped with us but are no longer here. But, death is also a time for confident praise of God who through his Son, Jesus Christ, has won the victory over death.

Those we love who have been lost to us have not been lost to God. They sleep peacefully in the arms of Jesus and, together with them, we will all wake up and know that we are home.