

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

And yet, according to Pew Foundation surveys, nearly one-quarter of American Christians do not believe it.

In fact, 24% of Christians in this country believe in the Eastern religious concept of reincarnation.

Eastern or New Age Beliefs			
<i>% who believe in...</i>	<u>Yes</u> %	<u>No</u> %	<u>DK</u> %
Reincarnation, that people will be reborn in this world again and again	24	69	6=100
Yoga not just as exercise but as a spiritual practice	23	70	7=100
Spiritual energy located in physical things like mountains, trees, crystals	26	69	5=100
Astrology, that the position of stars/planets can affect people's lives	25	71	4=100
Evil eye, or that certain people can cast curses or spells that cause harm	16	81	2=100
Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. Q291a-f.			

And many more are simply confused, thinking that resurrection and reincarnation are the same.

So let's try to reduce confusion.

Reincarnation is central to Indian religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism.

It contends that a certain non-physical aspect of a human being – consciousness, or personality, or thought – continues to live after the physical body has died.

That aspect then is reincarnated – that is, reborn in another physical body or life form in this world.

The cycle is repeated over and over again until the person gets things right.

The purpose of reincarnation is to allow this non-physical aspect of a person to perfect itself and be released from the cycles of reincarnation to unite with the divine.

Reincarnation requires no Savior – no atonement or redemption

– **it is all up to us to make better choices each time around.**

One of my seminary professors described reincarnation as a description of hell since we are separated from God until we make ourselves perfect.

The Bible says nothing about reincarnation.

It says a great deal about Resurrection.

Resurrection is the whole self

– body, consciousness, personality, thought

– being raised to new life and transformed by God *as itself*.

Resurrection depends upon Jesus

– that is, there is no resurrection of the dead apart from Jesus' own suffering, death, and resurrection

to forgive our sins,

cleanse us of impurity,

and present us as worthy to participate in God's life.

■ He makes life for us possible because we *cannot* perfect ourselves.

Resurrection is something by which *God* perfects us; and that's good news!

Reincarnation is something by which we must perfect ourselves – which is impossible – bad news.

So let me say it plainly

– **reincarnation has no place in Christian faith.**

It is an alien philosophy from other religions and denies the saving work of Jesus Christ.

...

Now, let's turn to **resurrection**.

What do we know about it?

What will we be like in the resurrection?

These are great questions – and ones that Paul reflected on at length in 1 Cor. 15.

So let us start where he did

– **with the actual witness accounts of Jesus risen from the dead.**

We know that the resurrected Jesus had a human body.

Today's story about the disciples on the Emmaus road indicates that.

Also the stories about Jesus eating fish and appearing to Mary Magdalene in the garden.

Jesus did not come to life as a bird or a butterfly or a slug – but as a man, a human being, *as himself*.

But it is true that the resurrected body is different from the body before death.

It can change its appearance – the risen Lord was not recognized at first by Mary or the disciples on the way.

He appeared to be someone else.

The resurrected body is not a ghost, as Jesus himself said in Luke 24:39: ³⁹ *See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.*”

Yet, Jesus’ resurrected body could pass through doors and disappear suddenly.

The resurrection body is the same, yet different.

St. Paul reflected that a single seed when planted does not come to life as a single seed, but as its proper form –

A watermelon seed grows to be a watermelon;

A sunflower seed grows to be a sunflower.

He likened the seed being planted as our human body buried in death.

⁴² *It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to*

live forever. ⁴³ *Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength.* ⁴⁴ *They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies.*

⁴⁹ *Just as we are now like the earthly man, we will someday be like the heavenly man.*

Resurrection, then, is of our whole being – not just part of us.

And our physical bodies are raised from the dead

– our own bodies

– **and they are transformed, perfected, made new by God.**

Just as the watermelon seed can be seen in the watermelon, or the sunflower seed in the sunflower,

so we will be identifiable as ourselves in the resurrection.

But how? And how will we recognize others?

Let us turn again to the eyewitness accounts of Jesus.

- Mary Magdalene recognized the gardener to be Jesus when he spoke her name.
- The two disciples on their way to Emmaus recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread and, retrospectively, as he interpreted the scriptures to them.
- Peter and the others in the upper room recognized him by his wounds and his words “Peace be with you.”
- And again, they recognized him by the miraculous catch of fish described in John 21.

So, in the resurrection, we will be recognizable by the ways in which our lives now reflect the glory of God.

Using Jesus as the example, he was known for bringing God's peace to his relationships during his earthly ministry.

Thus, the disciples recognized him as he shared that same peace in his resurrected self.

He was known to reveal God in the breaking of bread before his death – and after he rose, he was recognized in the breaking of bread.

So too, we will be recognized in the resurrection

by the ways in which we make God visible in our lives now.

This is the significance of that parable Jesus told in the 25th chapter of Matthew about the sheep and the goats

- those who are recognized as belonging to the kingdom of heaven are those whose lives here on earth reflect the glory of God
 - feeding the hungry,
 - giving drink to the thirsty,
 - clothing the naked,
 - sharing with the poor,
 - visiting the sick and imprisoned.

We will recognize others in the same way – **by the way their resurrected lives mirror their godliness in their earthly life.**

Jesus spoke of *actions* in Matthew 25, and the resurrection accounts tell of *actions and words*.

But along with actions and words comes personality – compassion, kindness, patience, goodness, joy, restraint –

Perhaps you recognize these as the fruits of the Holy Spirit listed in Galatians 5.

*****So we are recognizable in the resurrection – and recognize others – by the presence of the fruits of the Spirit.**

It is our baptismal identity, then, that is most recognizable in the resurrection –

We who are born of water and the Spirit, in whom the gifts and fruits of the Spirit are active and visible in our lives

And who are fed in the breaking of bread by which Jesus reveals himself.

– are recognizable as partakers of the resurrection.

Baptism and Communion are the signs of our participation in the resurrection of the dead at the last day.

In our baptismal life now, **we live as those who already are resurrected from the dead**

– in other words, **we live now as we will live in the heavenly realm of God.**

Let's go back to our story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. **The movement of the story is the same as the movement of the Christian life.**

They were living their lives without Jesus – for he was dead and buried. But then they encountered Jesus – and heard the Word of God that gives redemption and forgiveness.

They shared the meal which Jesus had said was his body and blood given and shed for them for the forgiveness of sins
– and he revealed himself to them in the breaking of that bread.

Then they changed direction – they turned around

– they repented of their unbelief – and returned to Jerusalem, to Peter and the other disciples.

And their lives were forever changed – transformed – as they eagerly awaited their final resurrection, telling everyone about Jesus.

So let's ask ourselves:

- How will our participation in the breaking of bread at the Lord's table today
 - and our awareness of our identity as children of God reborn in Holy Baptism
 - change the way we live day by day,
 - so that at the resurrection of the dead,
 - we are recognizable as people who here and now reflect the glory of God in what we say and do?

How will we live to be recognizable now as those who have been chosen for eternal life in the resurrection?

How will we live as God's Easter People?

For that is who we are.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Alleluia Christ is risen!