As we come to the end of our focus on this section of 1 Corinthians, Paul continues to talk about the mystery and the sacred victory we have as people of the resurrection. We do not, cannot, know *all* when it comes to God’s activity through resurrection. It is not fruitful to get caught up in appearance, the way God creates our resurrected bodies compared to the physicality, strengths and weaknesses of our earthly bodies.

Still, as sure as Adam, a man of dust, now also bears the image of Christ, the man of heaven, we too bear that image. It is the way of things for God’s creation since the day of resurrection.

Being someone who thoroughly enjoys and senses God abundantly in creation, I am very drawn to the seed imagery Paul uses to try to explain what we *can know* of how we are resurrected. If we were to compare what we *can* comprehend to earthly life and death, it might be like a seed. We plant it in the ground in one form. It is broken down and decayed by rain and microbes and the sun. And from it emerges something entirely new and alive.

I appreciate that Paul threw in a little side information here too … it’s easy to pass by in the larger message of Paul’s letter, but it seems worth attention. He says of this seed that in earth is dying and rising again, it’s “bare seed, perhaps of wheat or some other grain …” (1 Corin 15.37) And then in the verses we skipped, Paul says “Not all flesh is alike…” we are human, but other flesh is of the animals or birds or fish. (15.39ff)

Paul is reminding us once again of God’s inclination toward variety, diversity. The bare seed might be of wheat, or maybe a carnation, an Eastern White Pine tree or a tomato. All of them transform from seed entirely and differently. All of them function in individual ways and when combined, are capable of creating vast and balanced ecosystems.

Likewise, God is creating and re-creating us, this world and who knows what else in transformative ways from beginning to end, alpha to omega. It is an “end” we cannot fully see or understand. But we do get a glimpse of it through Jesus, our brother, our teacher, our Redeemer. It is a good glimpse, friends.

I like this little side comment also, because the idea of a variety of seed does take us all the way back to where we started six weeks ago in our 1 Corinthian adventure during this season after Epiphany.

We can see ourselves in these small house churches, I would argue, and so it stands to reason that we benefit from remembering the stories and experiences of our ancestors of the Christian faith.

We benefit, for example, when these letters compel us to recognize, celebrate and encourage one another’s gifts and contributions to our faith community and to the world. We continue to name and nurture these gifts in ourselves and others for the good of neighbor, even sacrificially at times. Our gifts are activated by the same Spirit of God, for the glory God. We have much to be thankful for when it comes to the ways God has gifted each of us – prayer warriors, communion servers, volunteers, teachers, dreamers and doers, benefactors and a lot more. AND when combined, these gifts and the people who bring them are capable of creating vast and balanced ecosystems of ministry.

These letters also remind us of the central roles of faith, hope and love in our lives – especially love when we walk the Way of Jesus. It is what sets us apart in this world … they’ll know we are Christian by our love, the song goes.

It’s also what makes this Way hard at times. Jesus directs us in one the most challenging ways of being different in our Gospel reading today. “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” (Luke 6: 27-28). This impossibly high expectation requires us to show our mettle, for sure.

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Shepherd is at a transformative time. In some ways it is as if a bare seed has been sown in God’s creation here … or perhaps a collection of them. And then over this long period of transition and challenge, those seeds have been broken down and decayed. The elements and community have changed and nourished these seeds as they’ve waited in God’s good earth.

No matter how we meet the day and the days ahead, God goes with us, of course. My sense, however, is that new creation is emerging from those seeds, and I don’t know about you, but I am more than curious about what God is up to here. I’m excited to be part of it. I pray you are too.

And here is where my thoughts often go these days …

As we head into the reflective and spare season of Lent that proceeds the greatest remembering of the church year – Holy Week and the Resurrection of our Lord …

As we strive to please God by pushing and preparing ourselves to live in unity, of seeing that we are all in this together, that in Christ we are one body …

As we move forward like the Sankofa Bird, casting wisdom’s glace backward to make sure we take the Good News with us …

As we hopefully, prayerfully and carefully come out of full-blown pandemic, into a more self-regulated call to love neighbor, especially the most vulnerable among us, like the little ones, our elders, those whose bodies are already struggling, those who cannot or will not get vaccinated …

As we come off these six weeks of considering the correspondence between Paul and those early Corinthian followers of Jesus; perhaps as we see both their giftedness and their brokenness in ourselves. …

As we prepare next week for a baptism and remembering the Transfiguration – that light-giving, light-contagious presence of Jesus on Earth …

Through all of this, and more certainly, I wonder – and I ask you to wonder too – how will that brilliant, glorious, life-giving light shine through us? How will those seeds sprout and grow for the glory of God and the sake of neighbor? How will all this richness and diversity create an ecosystem of ministry in us? Shepherd of the Lakes Lutheran Church – God’s small, but gifted and faithful people of the resurrection, in this 21st century, Midwest American house of Jesus followers.

Amen.