SCRIPTURE:
This image of planting a dead seed and raising a live plant is a mere sketch at best, but perhaps it will help in approaching the mystery of the resurrection body—but only if you keep in mind that when we're raised, we're raised for good, alive forever! The corpse that's planted is no beauty, but when it's raised, it's glorious. Put in the ground weak, it comes up powerful. The seed is natural; the seed grown is supernatural—same seed, same body, but what a difference from when it goes down in physical mortality to when it is raised up in spiritual immortality!

But let me tell you something wonderful, a mystery I'll probably never fully understand. We're not all going to die—but we are all going to be changed. You hear a blast to end all blasts from a trumpet, and in the time that you look up and blink your eyes—it's over. On signal from that trumpet from heaven, the dead will be up and out of their graves, beyond the reach of death, never to die again. At the same moment and in the same way, we'll all be changed. In the resurrection scheme of things, this has to happen: everything perishable taken off the shelves and replaced by the imperishable, this mortal replaced by the immortal. Then the saying will come true:

"Death swallowed by triumphant Life!
Who got the last word, oh, Death?
Oh, Death, who's afraid of you now?"

It was sin that made death so frightening and law-code guilt that gave sin its leverage, its destructive power. But now in a single victorious stroke of Life, all three—sin, guilt, death—are gone, the gift of our Master, Jesus Christ. Thank God!

With all this going for us, my dear, dear friends, stand your ground. And don't hold back. Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort.—1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 51-58

The Message
MEDITATION:
Having served as a pastor for nearly four decades, I have been both buoyed and puzzled by thinking about resurrection. Clearly, the people of Corinth were puzzled by it too because Paul labored hard to explain to them why it was important to believe in resurrection and to describe how to think about it. The image he worked with was a seed and the plant that grows from it: There is this small seed, barely visible, but in the ground something happens that it grows into a great plant that needs to be pruned to keep it from getting out of control. And then on the plant grows the tomatoes, or peppers, or pumpkins. How does that happen?

Water, nutrients in the soil, and the energy of sunshine cause interactions that form the proteins that grow into roots, stems, branches, leaves, and the parts we like to eat. Paul says that the seed goes into the ground and dies (v. 36), which isn't strictly true, but it looks that way. The seed, which is of little interest to us as it is, goes into the ground, and from it grows the plant that is of interest to us for making delicious BLT sandwiches. The analogy is that our physical life, as we are now, cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven: the physical body must first die, so that the useful spiritual body may grow from it in resurrection. Just as there can be no tomato plant without the seed, there can be no resurrection without the body; but a change must happen. Just as the DNA is the same from the seed to the plant, so the reality of myself is the same from the physical to the spiritual. Continuity, but change.

Even better, I think, is the analogy of the butterfly. From the egg emerges a caterpillar, which has just the same DNA as the egg, but the activity of the cells has differentiated into the caterpillar—or larva. The caterpillar eats ravenously, gathering the energy needed for the next stage: the pupa. Now you know that the caterpillar wraps itself inside a chrysalis, and the change from caterpillar to butterfly happens inside. What fascinates me is how it happens. I used to think that the worm-like caterpillar would sprout wings, and its body would gradually change shape until the butterfly would
emerge. But that isn't what happens. What happens is the caterpillar body is dissolved, it becomes an undifferentiated mass. And the cells in that mass begin to form all the parts of the butterfly, and when it is finished, it emerges from the chrysalis.

Christians have, for centuries, used the butterfly as an image for resurrection: we see a caterpillar go into a chrysalis and a butterfly emerge; we see a physical body go into a tomb and a spiritual body emerge. Now I see how perfectly appropriate the image is, because the caterpillar doesn't simply change into a butterfly; the caterpillar ceases to be as a caterpillar and something new and beautiful emerges. Yet it is still the same creature, with the same DNA, the same identity.

Thus I am helped to get a better sense of resurrection: resurrection life is not a mere continuity of the life we know, but it is also not a radical disruption. Continuity, but change.

**REFLECTION:**
Well, so what? When I was a college student, I took a basic earth sciences class; I forget its real title, but we called it "Rocks for Jocks." At the end of the class, the professor commented on what was then believed to be the life cycle of the universe, that the expanding universe would eventually turn back and everything that started with a Big Bang would end in a Big Crunch. The conclusion, after a term of studying the history of Earth and life on Earth, was "Nothing matters." Yikes! Nothing matters.

My professor was wrong, Paul assures us that because Christ is risen from the dead and we believe that we shall be raised from the dead, what we do does matter. As it says here, "Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort."

I see that reality in two ways, which I hope will spark your reflections.

1. What you and I do has an effect on the Kingdom of God. Simply helping the church in any way can add water and nourishment and sunshine to seeds for resurrection. The church is more than an institution or a building; it is people who are doing work for the Master, for the Lord Jesus. For your reflection: what do you do that adds nourishment to the seeds sprouting for the Kingdom of God, that feeds the caterpillar that will become God's butterflies?
2. The work you and I do has an effect on you. Though we do not (as of yet) change our own DNA, you can change your personality, your priorities, the things you hold dear, the things you let go of, and the things you value. What spiritual, physical vocational disciplines or practices are shaping the person you shall be for eternity?

As a pastor, I realize that resurrection is central to our faith as Christians (see 1 Corinthians 15:19). As a somewhat scientifically minded person, I often have a hard time believing in the reality of resurrection. Paul's thoughts in 1 Corinthians 15 help me enormously.

**PRAYER:**
Living God, source of life and of renewed life, thank you for the hope of resurrection. Especially we thank you for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which has brought your Kingdom to light and is the ground of our hope for ourselves. We pray for grace to live that hope, to do our calling in the name of the Master, confident that nothing we do for him is a waste of time or effort. Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we dare sing:

"Death swallowed by triumphant Life!  
Who got the last word, oh, Death?  
Oh, Death, who's afraid of you now?"

Alleluia! Amen.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Robert A. Keefer is pastor of Presbyterian Church of the Master in Omaha, Nebraska. He is a former president of the Presbyterian Association on Science, Technology, and the Christian Faith and has taught philosophy at the college level. For some years he represented the Ecumenical Roundtable on Science, Technology, and the Church at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. His particular research interest is in the doctrine of humanity ("Christian anthropology") in the light of evolutionary theory. He is married to Kathleen, who shares his love of role-playing games (D&D), and is a devoted runner and Scottish Country dancer.