

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C)

PROPER 27

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost

The Rev. Peter C. Jacobson, STS

Job 19:23-27a; 2 Thess 2:1-5,13-17; Luke 20:27-38

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

November 11, 2007

Wichita, Kansas

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

In a discussion about death, the “oracle of Omaha,” Warren Buffett, once remarked, “*What I want people to say when they pass my casket is, ‘Boy, was he old!’*”

Buffet is a financial investment genius and the second-richest man in America, but his joke hints at a very real anxiety in his life. You see, Buffet is not a Christian. He doesn’t believe there is life beyond the grave, and it worries him. Indeed, Buffet admits, “*There is one thing I am scared of. I am afraid to die.*”

His biographer Roger Lowenstein, writes:

*Warren’s exploits were always based on numbers,
which he trusted above all else.*

In contrast, he did not subscribe to his family’s religion.

*Even at a young age, he was too mathematical, and too logical,
to make the leap of faith.*

*He adopted his father’s ethical underpinnings,
but not his belief in an unseen divinity.*

And thus Warren Buffet, one of the richest and most successful men in the world, is stricken with one terrifying fear—the fear of dying.

Buffett is surely not alone in his doubt and his fear.

In today’s Gospel, the Sadducees — who did not believe in resurrection — confronted Jesus with the question of what life would be like if there truly was life after death. They wanted to expose the fallacy of what he taught. But, in a powerful statement about the reality of the resurrected life, Jesus declared that it is absurd to compare physical life with the resurrected life:

*Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage;
but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age
and in the resurrection from the dead
neither marry nor are given in marriage.*

Indeed they cannot die anymore

because they are like angels

and are children of God,

being children of the resurrection.

In a similar vein, St. Paul’s letters to the church at Thessalonika were devoted to addressing the issue of how to wait for the return of Christ. In today’s Second Reading, St. Paul confirmed the wisdom given in the passage from Luke’s Gospel, assuring the people that in the resurrection the faithful will be united with Christ. Paul wrote:

*As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ
and our being gathered together to him,
we beg you, brothers and sisters,
not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed. . .*

Certainly, this letter addressed the doubts that many Christians had about the return of Jesus and the context of life in the resurrection. As time went on after Jesus' death and resurrection, the early Christians began to lose hope of the imminent return of Christ. They began to question the promise of their own resurrection to a new life. But Paul gave them this assurance, he wrote:

*God chose you as the first fruits for salvation
through sanctification by the Spirit
and through belief in the truth.*

Like many of Paul's letters, this one sought to give strength, comfort, and assurance to Christians who were challenged in their faith by both external persecutions, and inner doubts.

Holding faith in the mystery and power of the resurrection is a challenge to all of us. We — like the early Christians — are tested and tried by both internal and external forces. Many messages from our culture — implicitly or explicitly — proclaim that this life is all there is, so go and purchase and consume all you can, while you have the chance.

The powers of death and evil are ever present. But, when we find our faith wanting, we have a place to go. The scriptures are full of passages which help us focus on the promise of the resurrection; both Christ's and our own. We have a deposit of faith in both the Old and New Testaments to strengthen and inspire us. We perhaps usually think of the gospels and the epistles as the places to go to hear the promise of the resurrection, but the Old Testament too, gives us a powerful affirmation of the promise of new life.

Today's First Reading is from Job, and Job is a great place to go for words of hope and inspiration. Job can give one faith, when it seems impossible to understand or explain the mystery of suffering.

The simple story is that Job was a righteous man who was "*blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.*" It is something of a difficult book, because the story of Job becomes a contest between Satan and God for the soul of Job. Satan challenges God to abandon Job and then see if Job would still continue to be faithful. The book recites the many trials and tribulations Job suffers, including being taunted by his friends to forsake his faith in God. In the passage we heard today, Job responded with perhaps the Old Testament's most well known affirmation of faith in the resurrection. Job declares:

*For I know that my Redeemer lives
and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;
and after my skin has thus been destroyed,*

then in my flesh I shall see God.

This powerful confession is well known to many because of Handel's *Messiah*. Indeed, not a few people think of that aria immediately upon hearing these powerful and moving words.

The question of what happens to us in the resurrection transcends time. Christians in all ages have posed similar questions to pastors and to themselves, just as the Sadducees did, who confronted Jesus. In our technologically advanced, scientific and medical world, the concept of a physical bodily resurrection is one dismissed by many.

But belief in the resurrection of Christ, is *the central article* of our Christian faith. We confess it every week, whether in the words of the Nicene Creed: "We look for the resurrection of the dead" or the words of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the. . . resurrection of the body." It is our foundational doctrine, one which gives us the hope and the assurance that we too shall be raised.

When we come to that resurrection, we will be fully united with Christ. Through our baptism into Jesus, and by our reception of his Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist, we affirm our belief in his promise of a resurrected life.

So, we should not trouble ourselves, as the Sadducees did, about what laws will or won't apply in the resurrection. Like Job and Paul, and countless faithful people throughout the ages, we are called to *simply trust* in the promise of the resurrection. We must believe that, in the mystery of the empty tomb, we are promised a life in the resurrection with our Lord Jesus, and with all of the saints who have gone before us. That is Christ's promise to his followers throughout the generations.

In our Second Reading, Paul declares:

***God chose you** as the first fruits for salvation
through sanctification by the Spirit
and through belief in the truth. . .*

***He called you** through our proclamation of the good news,
so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

And then Paul continues:

*So then, brothers and sisters,
stand firm and **hold fast** to the traditions*

*that you were taught by us,
either by word of mouth or by our letter. . .*

*[M]ay our Lord Jesus Christ. . . comfort your hearts
and strengthen them in every good work and word.*

God's love for you, his election of you, his promise of resurrection, comes with a call (John 15:16). God is never "just" Emmanuel — that is — he is never *just* with us, but rather he is with us in love, *and calls us too*. Too often we want comfort, but not strength for service and witness. St. Paul prays for both for the

Church in Thessalonika — *both* God's comfort *and* his strength. May we be granted both as well: the comfort of the promised resurrection, and the strength to bear witness to it — to share that good news with those who are need to hear it.

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

Credits: Frederic Guyott, III