

“O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book! O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives and at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. Job 19:23-27

Do you believe in the resurrection?

The Episcopal Burial office, Rite I, begins with three spoken anthems. One of which is, “I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though this body be destroyed, yet shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger. Slightly different language than the version in our OT reading today.

A powerful 2,500 year old statement of belief in a bodily resurrection. But, maybe not. According to scholars of ancient Hebrew and the ancient history of Judaism, that is not what Job meant. What Job is asking for in those desperate words is justice. He believes there is a someone on high – a redeemer, no capital r – (traditionally that would be someone from his extended tribal family) who can redeem him before God from the injustice he is suffering; a redeemer who will come after Job is dead. His profound desire is for his cry for justice to remain, to be indelibly etched forever. He wants his justification to come when he can observe it with his own eyes. Interpretation of very ancient words is not perfect, and so this too may be a misinterpretation.

The first clear reference to a belief in the resurrection of the dead, appears in Dan 12:2.

“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.”

And so while it is true that Job's words may have been misunderstood and / or for a very long time Christianized to support belief in a bodily resurrection; yet, is it not true that God speaks to us through words, written or spoken, or even misunderstood, in many surprising ways.

Do you believe in the resurrection? In your heart? In your soul?

By our Lord's day, there was considerable controversy between the Sadducees and the Pharisees regarding a bodily resurrection. The Pharisees, in their study of God's justice and covenant promises found in the Hebrew Scriptures, came to believe in a bodily resurrection. The Sadducees did not; they mocked and criticized those who held such a belief.

Jesus has entered Jerusalem for the last time. He has been teaching in the temple. More than once scribes and some of the religious leaders have tried to trip him up, show him up, so they can discredit him and cause him to be legally liable to arrest and punishment. They dare not go too far, for the crowd loves Jesus. Now, some Sadducees approach Jesus to pose a question about resurrection. They use an absurd example based on the assumption of a Levirate marriage. Their question to Jesus is meant to show up belief in a bodily resurrection as ridiculous, and is also intended to mock the Pharisees for their belief in a bodily resurrection.

Jesus does not rebuke them, but immediately begins to speak to them of resurrection in a manner that invites them into an understanding that resurrection is not a continuation of life as it is lived in this world, but is life that is wholly different; there is no need of marriage and children for it is life without death - as with angels - and will be life fully lived as children of God, being born of resurrection as children of God.

Knowing the Sadducees disavowed oral tradition and only followed the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures), Jesus brings before them the words written in Exodus wherein Moses speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and

the God of Jacob. Jesus concludes, “Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.” What then could they say?

Monday last, there was a memorial service here. The church was quite full. As the liturgy began with the anthems, those present heard these words: “I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” I wondered how many of those who were gathered truly believed in the resurrection. It can be a challenge even to the faithful, particularly when there has been a death. Did they wonder about the details? Perhaps along similar lines as the Sadducees. Do you?

Questions arise in the hearts and minds of those believe, as well as the skeptics who don't believe. Saint Paul addresses some concerns and questions about the bodily resurrection in 1 Cor 15:35-44.

Partially quoting Paul: “But someone will ask, 'how are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' ...What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed” And Paul goes on comparing death to the sowing of seed that dies, but eventually grows and is transformed into grain. He also said, “so it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable...” Or put another way – and perhaps too simply - “the seed never sees the flower.”

Do you believe in the resurrection? Jesus wants us to believe in the resurrection that we should not fear death, and that we should know human life is more than this earthly body and existence. We are intended eternal beings. Our lives are of consequence far beyond what we can know and understand now.

A well-know bishop said, when asked if he believed in the resurrection, “I have seen it too many times not to believe.” He went on to explain that resurrection life begins now, that the mercy, forgiveness, hope and love contained in the resurrection of Jesus can and

does raise up those lost in the depths of despair, bereft of love and belonging, dying for lack of hope.

Does your belief in the resurrection affect how you live day to day? What does it mean to you to hold dear that belief? Does it matter to your “every good work and word”? Does it help you to forgive as you have been forgiven and to treat all people with respect for their dignity as children of God? We all shall know in the resurrection God’s perfect judgement, justice, mercy, and love. What else it shall be, we do not know.

Perhaps our thoughts about resurrection are too small, too limited, too self-centered. Our creator God knows every atom of existence. None of it will be lost, none can go beyond the reach of God’s love, none will be forgotten. Trust that. And, we do not know what God intends beyond the resurrection other than whatever it shall be, will be of God’s love for each of us. Trust that. Every human is both a mortal being and a spiritual being and is invited to know God, believe God, and in dying to the mortal life return to God through resurrection – no longer mortal, but immortal.

Do you believe in the resurrection? In your heart, in soul, in your mind? Let it bring life and vigor to your life here and now, to your faith, to your relationships, and to your actions and prayers.

Now, using Paul’s words, “may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace, gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.” Amen.