

11.9.2025 Pentecost 22

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Job 19:23-27a; Psalm 17:1-9; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17; Luke 20:27-38

“Hold fast to the gospel”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

It’s hard to believe that Advent and a new church year will begin on November 30! As we near the end of the church year, the readings turn to ultimate themes of life and death. Today we are given the hope of new life in the resurrection, and a glimpse of eternal life, things we know now only by faith. Because we have not yet experienced it, we struggle to express what new life in the resurrection will be like.

Most days we spend our time living in the penultimate things of life – the daily duties and responsibilities of the world. We live among family and friends, enemies and adversaries. We accumulate money and material things, holding tightly onto them as if they were a sign of God’s favor in our lives. Yet human relationships and material things are not ultimate things. They are penultimate matters. Only the things of God are ultimate matters. Today’s readings remind us to look upward to God, trusting in God’s promises.

The story of Job is well-known: Job was a prosperous man who lived righteously and blamelessly before God. Job was blessed with both family and material things, yet even amid adversity, he looked to God. As the story of Job goes, one day the heavenly council gathered to present themselves before God, and Satan (pronounced Satahn), the accuser, was among them. God asked Satan, the accuser, where he had been and he replied that he had been walking all over the earth and had seen Job and how God had blessed Job. Satan said to God, *“But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.”*

After some reluctance, God removed divine protection of Job, allowing Satan, the accuser, to take Job’s wealth, his children and his health, but he was to spare Job’s life. Amid his misfortune, Job struggled to understand what was happening to him, yet he remained faithful to God, never once cursing God. Job said, *“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”*

What is important to see in the story of Job is the role of Satan, the accuser. The word “Satan” means “adversary” or “accuser.” In the story of Job, Satan the accuser is not yet the personification of evil incarnate as in later Judaism and Christianity. Satan’s role is to accuse and prosecute human beings before God. This helps us understand Job’s words, *“I know that my redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth.”* The word translated as “redeemer” really means “vindicator” – someone who will defend Job before God. Job is

saying, *“I know that my vindicator lives and he will help me in my need.”*

Job’s words express a longing for a redeemer who will vindicate us, who will plead our case before God so that God will restore us to life. Just as Satan, the accuser, stood between Job and God, accusing Job before God, Job confesses faith in a redeemer who will also mediate between God and himself. Job anticipates Christ the Mediator and Redeemer of the world.

Job then says, *“and after my skin has been destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God.”* This verse is notoriously difficult in the Hebrew text, yet it offers a glimpse of a hope of life after death, of new flesh and new life after the flesh of our penultimate lives has been destroyed.

And so, we arrive at Jesus’ conversation with the Sadducees in today’s gospel. The Sadducees, we are told, did not believe in the resurrection. In contrast to the Pharisees and the Essenes, who believed in eternal life, the Sadducees were wealthy and successful Hellenized worldly Jews who lived firmly in the penultimate everyday of this life.

Their question about marriage reflects a concern with the penultimate institutions of this world (and Mosaic law, Deut. 25:5-10), which they assume will continue in the afterlife.

Jesus’ response is truly astonishing. He says, *“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.”* Jesus is distinguishing between the penultimate and the ultimate, between life as we know it and life in the age of the resurrection. Jesus is saying, marriage is an institution of this age and won’t exist in the resurrection, yet in the resurrection, those raised to new life will *“be like angels and are children of God.”*

Jesus then uses the example of Moses standing before God in the burning bush as God says to Moses, *“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”* (Ex. 3:6). In the burning bush, God speaks about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as living and alive. Just as the fire did not consume the bush because God was in the fire, so too, death had not consumed Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The hope of the resurrection is that death will not consume you, but you will be raised because Christ the Mediator has overcome death.

As Christians, we live, like Job, with faith in a Redeemer who will vindicate us before God. Like Job, we believe in a Mediator who stands between this age and the age to come.

Though it is hard to believe, though it goes against all rational thought, Job urges us to believe in a gracious God whose Redeemer and Mediator will vindicate and raise us to eternal life. In this way, Paul urges the Thessalonians – and us – to stand firm and hold fast to the traditions we have been taught. Belief in the resurrection is the center of our faith. The good news of Jesus is that by faith we will be raised. Paul urges us to hold fast to the tradition of the

gospel so that we might obtain the glory of Christ. Amid the adversities of this life, Paul encourages you to praise God and strengthen yourself with good works.

Faith in the Redeemer frees you to live in service to God and your neighbor. Faith strengthens you to lift and feed the poor and weak; welcome the foreigner; care for the sick and the imprisoned; and to remember the orphan and the widow. In a world of self-service and self-promotion, faith allows you to decrease as Christ increases in you. Hold fast to the gospel. *God is not the God of the dead but of the living, for to him all of them* – and each of us are made alive in Christ.

Yet today, who stands fast? Death stalks the earth. Satan, the accuser walks this earth. Who stands firm, holding fast to the gospel? Evil is truly present in the things and institutions of this world, yet the gospel does not change because of the world's shifting ideological or political fortunes. We live in an age when wrong is declared right and when falsehood is declared the truth. As Paul writes, the "lawless one" exalts himself above all others, above every god and object of worship, declaring himself to be God. Who stands fast in the gospel today?

Stand firm in faith. Your Redeemer lives. Hold fast to the gospel of God's love for the poor and the weak because God is at work in this world through you.

Please take a moment to look at your hands. Perhaps you can remember when your hands and skin looked younger. Perhaps your hands bear the scars of life. Think about all the work your hands have done during your life and remember your hands are the hands of the Redeemer. In Christ, God gives you the power to be Christ's hands for your sister and brother in need.

One day, you will die. After your skin has been destroyed, then, in the new flesh of the resurrection, you will see God. And God will ask you if you have kept the faith, if you have loved and served your neighbor.

How will you answer? Look at your hands. Hold fast to the gospel and serve others. Amen.