

“I know that my Redeemer lives” [Job 19: 23-27 (and Luke 20:27-38)]

“I know (myself) that my Redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will
stand upon the earth.
And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;
I myself will see him
with my own eyes – I, and not another.”
[How my heart (my inner being) yearns within me!"]

Lord, speak to us now. As we reflect on your word may we live life together in the flow of your love.

When I was licensed as a Reader, just over three years ago, Rev'd Tom gave me a copy of “A Pastoral Ministry Companion”. It contains services and prayers to be used with the sick and dying. Little did I know then that the first person with whom I would share those readings and prayers would be my own mother.

Mum wasn't well before Christmas (2019) and was eventually taken into hospital at the end of January. By this time, she wasn't very lucid. I remember that the nurses kept asking mum herself her name and asked where she lived. She didn't get her name wrong, but she began giving various addresses of homes she'd lived in over the previous 60 years or so.

On a later occasion in hospital mum's response was, “I want to move.” We played along with her, “Where do you want to live now?” She replied, “Heaven. I want to live in heaven.”

Mum knew the words that her Lord and saviour had said to his disciples, *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may be where I am.”* (Jn 14:1-4)

Mum knew where, after death, she was going. She knew Jesus, who said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.”* (Jn 14:6).

When reflecting on the Bible passages for today I felt it right to make a connection with All Souls Day and today's Job reading in particular.

The phrase “I know that my redeemer liveth,” is probably best known as the soprano aria from Handel's Messiah. But they are words spoken by Job in the book after his name. This profound statement appears in the middle of a long discussion Job is having with friends who had supposedly come to comfort him following his losses. Unfortunately for Job, they offered little comfort.

Job is an interesting and somewhat mysterious character. We're likely familiar with Job and the great trials he faced in life, but little is known about his background. He's believed to have lived around the time of Abraham - the book opens with a description of Job being from the land of Uz, as was Abraham. As we are introduced to Job, we immediately discover a man who was committed to the Lord; he's described as blameless and of integrity, he feared God and shunned evil.

Often when Job is considered, the emphasis is often placed on his suffering or trials. He'd lost his family, his livelihood and even his own health. Perhaps we ourselves can identify with aspects of this story.

My mum died just as Covid was becoming dangerously virulent in the UK; we were fortunate to have her funeral just a few days before the lockdown was announced. But it meant we couldn't continue supporting each other as a family in ways we would have expected and hoped for. Dad was on his own, with my brother's Jack Russell for company (and an excuse to go out walking), for four months.

People died of Covid, livelihoods were lost, plans and dreams abandoned. Tremendous loss of all sorts that many people are still in grief over. Now, a war in Ukraine, economic uncertainty here and around the world, adds to that previous and ongoing trauma.

Job suffered great loss, and we can read that he, quite rightly, expressed grief, anger, puzzlement, frustration and betrayal. Yet, despite his great loss Job was still able to say, "I know that my redeemer lives." A profound statement indeed!

If I say to you, "Do you know 'so and so'?" You may know who that person is, or know of them, or have read about them. But that doesn't mean you know them. I don't just know my wife, Julia, by her name. I know her and am still getting to know her (and she, me!). It takes time and effort, doing things together, talking and listening, and so on. Job didn't say, "I know of a redeemer." It wasn't head knowledge or theoretical.

He said, "I know that my redeemer lives." In one Bible translation I looked at it says, "I myself know that my redeemer lives." It was his own intimate relationship with God that enabled him to say this. We don't know how Job nurtured his relationship with God, but we do know that he was in awe of God and shunned evil, that he was conscious of what was right and wrong and wanted others to be kept pure before God. It was a two-way relationship: God also knew Job, "Consider my servant Job," God said to the Adversary.

Do we have an advantage over Job? I don't know. As well as being able to pray, we have the scriptures that we can read and study together. We can meet together to encourage one another, to spur one another on to love and good deeds (or service) so that in our relationships with God we can each say, with increasing confidence, "I know my redeemer."

Job also knew that his redeemer lives. He may have lost family and all worldly possessions, with no way of knowing where his life was headed. At this point in life, he would have to start over. Job knew very little at this moment, but he knew one thing for certain – his Redeemer lived. His hope was not in an idol made by human hands, one which had no power. He did not worship a monument that lacked the ability to see, hear, or move in his situation. Job knew he served the living God. Life had not been kind to Job in his recent days, but his misfortune had not altered the existence or power of the God he served.

We all suffer loss from time to time, forced to deal with the uncertainty that lies ahead. We cannot know what tomorrow may bring, but we can know who holds tomorrow. When suffering and pain comes our way, we can rest in the fact our Redeemer lives! He is alive and well today, able to provide for every need we face. Because our Lord lives, those who are saved by grace have the promise of eternal life in Him. Because he lives, we too have life! We too can say, "I know that my Redeemer lives."

Job also knew the Redeemer would come back. Life will have its share of hardship and pain. None who live in this life escape adversity. We face our own mortality. If our hope rested in this life alone, we would live a miserable existence. However, like Job, we can rejoice knowing our Lord will come again. He came the first time as the sacrifice for our sin. He will come again as Lord and Judge. He was taken up in the clouds as He returned to the Father, but he left the promise to come again. The trials we face may bring heartache and pain, but we have the assurance that our Lord is coming again for those who have been saved by his grace! Remember the words of Jesus, "*In my Father's house are many rooms;*" and "*I will come back and take you to be with me that you may be where I am.*"

Ultimately, Job knew there was life after death. Although Job lived long before Christ would come and conquer death, he had hope and assurance of life beyond death. Job was confident that he would stand in the presence of God, and that he would see the one he loved and served.

Job suffered much and yet his faith was not destroyed. Despite his loss and his pain, he was comforted, not by the three friends who visited him, but through knowing his Redeemer lived. He was confident that the Lord would come, and he would enjoy the Lord's presence beyond death.

My prayer for all of us, me included, is this, that we can each say, with increasing confidence, "I know that my Redeemer lives?"

Amen

James Parsons, 6 November 2022