



“BELONGING TO THIS AGE”
SCRIPTURE: JOB 19: 23-27a; LUKE 20: 27-38
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
November 10, 2019
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Job 19:23-27a

19:23 "O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book!

19:24 O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock forever!

19:25 For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;

19:26 and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God,

19:27a whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

Luke 20:27-38

20:27 Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him

20:28 and asked him a question, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother.

20:29 Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless;

20:30 then the second

20:31 and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless.

20:32 Finally the woman also died.

20:33 In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her."

20:34 Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage;

20:35 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.

20:36 Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children

of God, being children of the resurrection.

20:37 And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

20:38 Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."

We could have easily mistaken today as a day that scripture is calling us to affirm and even entrench Christianity's stated belief in bodily resurrection.

The human brain prefers efficiency over complexity—it is built for short cuts—for hearing what we expect to hear, for interpreting knowledge to fit into what we already think we know.

The hard truth is that the human mind is more often stubborn than discerning.

Our brains are gullible when it comes to accepting things that fit into our way of seeing things. And our brains are resistant when it comes to realizing that we are wrong.

That tendency of ours—that no doubt has come in handy when it comes to survival evolutionarily, is really what makes today's lectionary passages a timely moment of truth for us as citizens of this planet, and particularly of this country.

"Belonging to this age" in our historical moment seems to just be another way of saying pick a worldview and stick with it.

But Jesus is trying to jolt us awake—he's trying to teach us that our best hope as a species is not digging in, but in letting ourselves be transformed.

The Sadducees were known as a conservative group of philosophically minded Jews. They were aristocracy and often perceived as haughty. They were not open to oral traditions like the Pharisees were. They believed the written tradition to be the only authoritative source. They did not believe in bodily resurrection.

They approach Jesus determined to expose the ridiculousness of bodily resurrection. They use levirate marriage to prove their point—levirate marriage was how women and their children remained part of the family's property upon the death of a husband. When a woman lost her husband, the law said she then became the wife of the husband's brother.

The Sadducees take that practice to its most absurd extreme and try to use that as proof for why resurrection couldn't be possible. Who would be a woman's husband in heaven if a woman had married 7 brothers?

And how you interpret Jesus' answer really depends on what beliefs you come to this passage hoping to confirm.

The Sadducees weren't often thought of generously in rabbinic traditions so their presence in this passage probably served as a kind of stereotype confirmation in that cultural context. Here's another example of them trying to use their political influence to prove a theological opponent wrong.

So you could read it as a debate that Luke has Jesus winning by taking things like Mosaic Law, something the Sadducees strictly adhered to, and using it to prove them wrong. It's a common practice in debates, appeal to the stated values of one's opponent to convince them that they have to see things your way, too.

I kinda doubt any Sadducean minds were changed that day, but it sure gave the resurrection enthusiasts a great argument to entrench their own worldviews.

But what is Jesus really saying here. There's something cryptic about the metaphors and language he is using. Basically he's saying, this life isn't like eternity. The things we do in this life don't matter the same in eternity. It's different; we're different. But how that all gets worked out, he pretty much chalks up to something we can't really understand.

He invites us into a brain space that isn't really our comfort zone—he is asking us to trust a theological imaginary—a world we will only know when we taste it, when we enter it.

The Job passage is a perfect example of how hard it is for us encounter a challenge to our understanding.

This passage has been used for centuries by Christians and scholars of theology and scripture as evidence that bodily resurrection is true, reading back into Hebrew scripture a Christian concept in order to confirm that very concept.

It's another well-worn path of our stubborn brains, especially the collective brains of a culture convinced of its own supremacy and its own certainty. Appropriate a story and turn it into your story.

Job has given up on prayer. Job has given up on God. This passage is actually not about resurrection. This passage is not about a divine redeemer.

This passage is about Job holding onto the last thread of dignity and humanization he can hold on to—that somewhere out there in the human race, is a person who will not let the world forget his story when he is dead. Somewhere out there is a person who will see to it that justice is finally served on his behalf.

Job is referencing a custom of his culture. That someone wronged, someone who has suffered injustice who did not see justice before their death, or for some reason could not seek it for themselves, can be advocated for after death the nearest male relative in the family member, a *go-el*, who takes up the cause and sees that justice is done.

If the injustice was that land was stolen, the *go-el* sees that the land is returned to the family's ownership. If the injustice was loss of resources, the *go-el* sees that those resources are returned to the family.

Job is not talking about a redeemer as a messianic figure, he is using the word as an impersonalized noun. He has to believe that he will have that person who vindicates him in death after all that he has lost—and the vindication is against God.

Then Job says that's not good enough for him. He doesn't want to be vindicated in death. He wants to experience it himself in this lifetime.

And yet, still, common translations of the text capitalize the word "Redeemer" to make it easy to read a Christian belief back into the Hebrew scripture.

It's hard for our Christian ears to hear the magnitude of Job's lament. Perhaps we have distorted it to be about resurrection or about Jesus, to avoid what it is really about—an impacted person calling out for his brothers, his sisters, his human family to do right by him in the ruins of his life.

Perhaps that lament is a cry our Christian ears refuse to hear because it echoes with the jarring truth of how much we've harmed the human family with the injustices we have wrought—with the land Christians have seized in God's name, with the lives Christians have stolen in the name of God, with the horrible injustices Christians have wrought on all manner of people through the generations—in so many cases we have not done right by them. We have let their stories be lost or we have stolen them, too, and made them into something that props up our story.

You see when you mix the stubborn human brain with the desire to dominate and hoard power and the belief that God authorizes your worldview, you've got a destructive force that can decimate whole cultures and psyches and worldviews.

Attorney Bryan Stevenson is making a strong plea to America for us to admit we've got our own story wrong. He wants us realize the depth of our need to be reeducated and he wants us to embark on the hard journey of relearning our story.

It begins with the story of stolen land and genocide of the indigenous peoples and tribes that were on this land hundreds, even thousands of years before European contact. And it continued in the terror of chattel slavery, Jim Crow, and segregation. And it continues today in mass incarceration, public education, and in every layer of our lives together.

Bryan Stevenson says, "The North won the Civil War, but the South won the narrative war... And that is why I say that slavery didn't end in 1865. It evolved."¹

Stevenson is referring to the narratives about Black people that say they are less than human, that say they are not capable of the same things white people are capable of, that say Black people are dangerous and to be feared. These narratives are still with us and still determine so much of the way we build our communities and our systems and our mentalities.

The 1619 project is also an invitation to the United States to reeducate ourselves. This project calls us to admit to ourselves that we've been taught wrong, that we've held on to a stubborn delusion about who we are and that it is continuing to fracture communities and diminish lives and do real harm.

And while more and more white people are accepting that this work is ours to do and engaging in the hard work of reeducation, there are many who resist it with every trick in the book—from passive resistance to active and even violent refusal.

Which brings us back to our moment in history, to our identity as people of faith. It's a strange twist of our salvation story, that people of faith who believe in a proximate God, a God who took on a body to be near us and heal us, who believe that God is constantly calling us to repent, to change, to believe that we can be made new—it is a strange and tragic twist that people of faith have become some of the most set in our ways, some of the most unwilling to be corrected, some of the most stubborn about our certainty.

We have forgotten our place in the human family. We have forgotten God's call for us to be in solidarity with our siblings who have been wronged, who are seeking justice that has not been realized.

Who are we to defend ourselves against God's healing opportunity—the opportunity to finally tell the truth about our American story and to heal the generational wounds that we all carry?

We should be the earliest adopters of this journey to save our souls.

Jesus' call to the stubborn faithful to shake loose of our habits of mind with the power of a faithful imagination is the call we need to embrace as directed to us—not just for all the other Christians out there who we think are wrong about things.

This Table is nothing if it is not about transformation. Why do we come here if we are not hungry and thirsty for God's power to heal us, to change us, to reconnect us with each other and with a wounded world.

This Table is God sharing in our vulnerability in order to seek us where we are most in danger of losing our way—our stubborn refusal to know who we really are.

Christ calls us to this Table to be put back together, to be re-membered by the truth we carry in our bones, in our bodies, in our common life—that God's promise of new life is both for the living and the dead, for the stubborn and the willing, for the harmful and the harmed—for all of us belonging to this age.

Thanks be to God.

¹ <https://psmag.com/.amp/magazine/bryan-stevenson-ps-interview>