

### “My Redeemer Lives”

We are used to political commentators and hacks doing their best to catch their opponents in a “gotcha” statement. Political ads are the most devious. With a little creative editing, a candidate’s team can make their rival say the most unbelievable things. But before digital editing, Photoshop, and now AI, the opposing sides had to be more creative. They had to set up a trap. They had to be sure there was a crowd witnessing the engagement to maximize the word of mouth. Then everything had to come together at just the right time

Today in the passage from Luke’s Gospel, we heard a desperate attempt by a group of Sadducees to try to get Jesus with a “gotcha” question. First, it is important to understand that the Sadducees were a sect of Judaism in the first century. We more often hear about the Pharisees, who were another Jewish sect. There were a number of differences between the two groups. For the purposes of this reading and today’s discussion, there are two differences that stand out.

First, the Pharisees believed in an afterlife, and particularly a resurrection of the dead at the end of time. The Sadducees did not accept the idea of resurrection. Second, as a sect, the Pharisees tended to locate themselves in the rural areas. We often hear about Jesus encountering them in the synagogues, which were local places of gathering and worship. The Sadducees located their power in the Temple in Jerusalem. They, more than any other sect, had decided to cooperate with their Roman overlords in order to keep control of the Temple and the religious rites. It was not a cynical move entirely. They were protecting their religion from the harsh rule of the Romans. The religion was important to the people. It also defined who they were in contrast to pagans such as the Romans, who worshiped many gods and even deified their emperor.

In this passage, Jesus is in the precincts of the Temple, so it is the Sadducees' job to try to discredit Jesus with the crowds. In order to do so the Sadducees concocted a ludicrous scenario. They do so by using the concept of resurrection, something in which they do not believe. But anything to get this Galilean Rabbi in a quandary that ends up humiliating him in front of his followers. The scheme also relies on a concept of Jewish law that is in the Torah, but scholars question whether it was ever practiced.

This concept is called Levirate marriage. The idea is that if a man dies and leaves his widow without children, his brother is to marry the widow and raise up children in his dead brother’s name. We see this as the background to the story of Tamar and Judah in Genesis 38.

These Sadducees contrast a situation where the same woman is married by seven brothers. As one dies, she marries the next one and so forth until all

of them have died. The Sadducees now want Jesus to tell them which one will be her husband after the resurrection.

What I would give to see Jesus' expression after they finish describing this situation. I wonder if he did not look at them as if they each had a few extra holes in his head. I can also imagine him saying, "You are not serious, are you? You want me to answer this absurd question?" Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he says what Luke reports. That is, the resurrection is not like this life. It is something quite different. You do not have or need a spouse after the resurrection. We are each fully alive in and with God. We are complete in God, not in a marital relationship. The Sadducees had to walk away like Yosemite Sam, saying, "Dagnabbit, he did it again" as they tried to dream up another "gotcha scenario."

This brings me to our first reading from Job. Had the Sadducees paid a little more attention to this beautiful praise poem from Job, they might not have been so foolish in their attempt to entrap Jesus. For what Job says:

"I know that my Redeemer lives,  
    and that 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"<sup>1</sup>

Job who has lost everything dear to him in the world—children, cattle, and other livestock due to a bet between God and his worker, the satan. (This is not Satan of the Gospels, who is another biblical character with the same name). Job sits on an ash heap with his friends, contemplating his downfall. He concludes, despite his tremendous losses, that he knows God is alive! He proclaims that at the end of time, God will stand upon the earth. Then comes the crucial and beautiful part. Job says, after my skin has been destroyed, then in my flesh I will see God, and I will see God and no other.

To some, this might sound like the ravings of a religious nut, or the passions of a mystic. I hear Job telling us that our bodies will be gone, and at that time we will see God in our essence. It will not be this corporal body that we dress up that is presented to God, but the core of our being, what Richard Rohr calls the true self, which is our flesh. And when we see God, our eyes will only be able to take in the glory and majesty of the Most High. Spouses, children, family, and friends who are so important in this life will be supplanted by a higher love—our love of God and God's love for us.

Many people are comforted by the promise of meeting family and friends in the afterlife. I do not think Jesus or Job are ruling that out. But they are

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<sup>1</sup> Job 19:25-27, NRSV

saying that life will be transformed. No longer will we need to strive and struggle with the cares of this world. The love for which we yearn, the relationship for which we are made, will come to fruition in our new life in God. This passage is so precious to the Church and to believers that it is one of the first anthems in the burial rite of the Episcopal Church

In closing, I ask that you ponder Job's words for yourself. Write them on your heart and in your mind. Cherish the ecstatic promise that has come down through the centuries and rings with the same truth as when it was written in the Book of Job.

"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."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Book of Common Prayer, [New York, The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979], p.469