

“I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth” (Job 19.25)

The lessons throughout this Easter Season certainly share with us the joy of the Resurrection. We experience this in the new life that was given to our Lord, the life given to his disciples to share the good news, and the new life of the Church. We also experience this joy in the knowledge of the new life which is promised for all of us who participate in Christ’s resurrection. But this joy is not *only* something we *have* experienced, or *will* experience, but it’s also something that we *constantly* experience in our lives now – not just later. The key message of the resurrection is, of course, new life. It is, importantly, about the life of Jesus risen from the grave. But it is also just as much about how Jesus continues to live, and how his life intermingles with ours.

Our lessons for this week highlight for us the importance of God’s grace: the unending, ever-present gift of God’s goodness. And this gift takes its most manifest form as his own presence among us. The presence of God is one of the features of Christianity that makes it unique: that God came to the earth as one of us – the Incarnation. That God dwells with us, taught us, died as one of us, and rose again. That God not only made the world, but inhabited the world, and whose spirit continues to inhabit the world.

The figure at the centre of our Old Testament Lesson is easily a person who can express his relationship with God better than anyone else. The book of Job is quite an interesting study in the theology of suffering: Job, named at the beginning of the book as being the most God-fearing person on earth, becomes the centre of a sort of game among supernatural beings. A character named the devil wagers with almighty God that he can trick Job into thinking God’s abandoned him. God condones the test because he is resolute that Job will not stumble despite all the bad things in the world affronting him. Scholars look at the book of Job through a metaphorical lens: rather than a story that really happened, that God really would allow one of his people to be handed over to torture, it is seen as an illustration of an unmovable, unshakable faith in God. And, despite all that the devil throws at Job: the death of his loved ones, great catastrophe, and unfair hardships, Job never does truly forsake his God – even though it sometimes seems God has forsaken him. Job is held up as an example of a stalwart believer who relies not upon the things of the world, but only upon the promises of God.

Our lesson for today highlights how Job understands his situation: despite all of his trials, why does he keep going? “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, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another” (Job 19.25-27). I know that my Redeemer *lives*. He is not dead but is very much alive – he lives and breathes, and moves, and acts. From our Easter perspective, this is especially poignant, for we cannot help but apply Job’s word directly to our own living, risen, saviour Christ.

Jesus, when talking in the Gospel to his disciples, develops this a bit further, too. Not only is it good that he lives, but he will be going away and will send the Comforter – the Holy Spirit – to be with them, to *live* with them. This third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, will continue the work that has been started – and will continue it in all Christians. And, looking at the Epistle, we can see the Holy Spirit as the “implanted word” which St. James addresses – the living embodiment of Jesus in us – which is able to save our souls. For every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above – the Holy Spirit, that most perfect gift – is an extension of the grace of God.

It is this grace of God, the gifts of the resurrection and the Holy Spirit, which fill us with this joy in the living God. This Eastertide joy which has us celebrate new life and growth both in our physical lives and in our spiritual bodies. And, as usual, God has us looking at what’s next: looking at what’s ahead with his joy in our hearts. Jesus’ promise of the Comforter is a further illustration of the very deliberate and planned steps required for the salvation of the world. We are encouraged to look ahead to our salvation, as we recall, like Job, all the wonderful things that he has done to get us where we are.

Borrowing a bit from next Sunday's agricultural tones, it is good to look at this narrative of salvation in a way many of us can understand at this time of year: gardening and growth. After a winter of cold, harsh weather, life starts to come back to what seemed long dead. But for us to grow a beautiful, healthy garden, there is some work that must be done: we must rake, we must pull back the dead from last year, we must make space for the new plants while tending to the old growth. And we must, plant, fertilize, continue to prune, and deliberately care for our plants to bring them to fruit.

This is a very pertinent metaphor for the Christian life. God is always tending us, as his garden, so that we might grow stronger, safer, and bear more fruit. Even when we see the perennials poking their head out of the garden in the spring, their growth is made better by setting them up for success by clearing the debris from their path, by observing them come back to life, and by doing what we can to make them grow stronger. God does this with us, too. Just as anyone who's ever grown mint knows, the Holy Spirit coming to dwell in the Church helps to take one spur of growth to infinite numbers by the way it spreads out and touches new lives.

God, the great gardener, has planted in us the seeds of faith, has watered, and nourished us through his Word, and has sent us the Holy Spirit that we might be fully alive in Christ. All of these gifts are the good gifts from above. They are all gifts which help us to bear fruit, to spread the good news of His Gospel. The indwelling of his Word, and the attention we give to following his commands, gives us the tools we need to save our souls. Even when the gifts from above seem harsh: the frost comes, wildfire destroys, or as we might experience in our lives grief, sickness, and death, we know that God is in command. For when the spring comes, when the Lord sits on his throne in judgement, we find our new life.

So, while the Gospel overtly begins to turn us towards the Ascension of Christ, and the coming of the Spirit, it is not to sadden us that Jesus is no longer walking among us in the flesh, but it encourages us that the Spirit moves to make us bigger than we are without him. It encourages us that we are never truly left alone. And it also encourages us that when the harsh weather appears to kill the plants, there is new life yet to be had.

And, in all of this, what makes it so important is the words of Job: "I know that my redeemer lives." The idea of a *living* God is extremely important, for us as for Job: because it means that God goes about his life in concert with us. It means that God takes delight in what life looks like for us. And it means that God walks with us when life looks bleak.

The lessons for today, reflecting on God's grace affirm to us that God is always looking for ways to meddle in our lives. It's not that he wants to ruin our lives – I'd argue quite the opposite. He wants to see us thrive and provides us the tools and care to do so. He sends spirit to be with us in an even more intimate way – we have a living redeemer who doesn't just do things out of a bland idea of fate or destiny. He walks with us, breathes with us, and guides us on our way. We have plenty of hard work to be done, no doubt, but the Holy Spirit comes to do that work *with* us. He helps us, as the gardener tends the soil, determine what needs to be weeded out and what needs to be encouraged. It requires us to trust him, to listen to him, and to follow where he leads us.

All this means that the resurrection wasn't something that just *happened*, but the promises of that empty tomb are not empty because we can experience them personally and they grow in us. The empty tomb for us means that God is alive and at work. And through our lives, God does not leave us alone. He wants to deal with us.

As St. James encourages us all: "lay aside all filthiness and residue of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

And now unto God...