

PENTECOST: IN FAITH WE RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 27)

November 11, 2007

Job 19:23-27a

Psalm 17:1-9

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17

Luke 20:27-38

I know that my Redeemer lives!

These words from Job 19:25 (*NRSV*) are familiar and comforting. Indeed, the opening line from a hymn composed by Samuel Medley (1738-1799) begins with these words, followed by the line, “What comfort this sweet sentence gives!” To be sure, Job was in need of comfort! Described as “a truly good person, who respected God and refused to do evil” (1:1, *CEV*), Job, nevertheless, loses all his possessions and suffers terribly.

The book of Job attempts to address the causes of human suffering, and the passage from this week’s Old Testament reading is set within the context of Job’s reply to Bildad, one of Job’s friends who seeks to help Job understand the cause of his suffering. Although Job complains to God (chapters 10, 17), saying he is sick of life (10:1) and that his hopes have died (17:1), in this week’s short reading we sense that Job is confessing his hope and trust in God – God who is with us in times of suffering and who gives us strength to face the future.

In Hebrew, the word “Redeemer” (*go’el*) refers to a relative who was expected to buy back property that one was forced to sell (Leviticus 25:25) or who redeems another who was sold into slavery (Leviticus 25:48). Given Job’s destitute state, his appeal is to a heavenly ally who will represent him before God and “redeem” him from his life of suffering. Job’s plea (19:26, 27) is echoed in the closing verse of Psalm 17: “I am innocent, LORD, and I will see your face!” (17:15, *CEV*).

To see the face of our Redeemer is to see the face of God. As Jesus said to his disciple, Philip, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father” (John 14:9, *CEV*). And Jesus, our Redeemer, is the “one who raises the dead to life” (John 11:25, *CEV*) and who has promised “to prepare a place for each of [us]” (John 14:2, *CEV*).

Today’s Gospel text positions us in a scene where we witness a confrontation between Jesus and his opponents concerning life in the future world. This time his opponents are the Sadducees, a priestly class within Jewish society who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and who were known for their emphasis on the Law (Torah). Their question concerning a woman who had seven husbands who predeceased her was designed to trap Jesus in a contradiction on the afterlife.

The question put forth to Jesus was grounded in the levirate law concerning marriage – a law that required a widow, whose husband died childless, to marry one of the deceased man’s brothers so that her first husband’s name would continue beyond his death, thereby giving him an afterlife (Deuteronomy 25:5). But Jesus responds with a view of the afterlife that is beyond the patterns of the world – he speaks of the resurrected life where those who are raised to life will be “like the angels and will be God’s children” (Luke 20:36, *CEV*). Jesus turns the tables, so to speak, on the Sadducees by quoting from Torah (Exodus 3:6) in recounting God’s words to Moses – “the God worshiped by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ... isn’t the God of the dead, but of the living” (Luke 20:37, 38, *CEV*).

Yes, with Job, we, too, can testify that our Redeemer lives! Through Jesus, God has “given us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope” (2 Thessalonians 2:16, *CEV*). What comfort that sweet sentence gives!

This week’s Reflection was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel, who serves at the American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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Today we remember to pray for the work of Bible Societies in: Cameroon – With thanks to God for the warm reception for the Tupuri Bible and for the completion of translation projects in Kwaja, Vute, Mofu, Ngiemboon, and Gizga, and with prayers for the continued success of HIV/AIDS prevention program, the *Faith Comes By Hearing* program and work among TAZI audiences, for the ability to supply Scriptures to Sao Tome and Principe, for the new team in Equatorial Guinea and that the authorities will respond positively there to Bible work; **Central African Republic** – With thanks to God for the good response to the Gbaya New Testament, and with prayers for the completion of the Gbaya Old Testament project and for efforts to raise awareness of the dangers of HIV/AIDS; **Gabon** – With prayers for the challenges associated with the revision of old translations, the creation of new translation projects, and recruiting Scripture distributors to cover the entire country.

Activity Corner: “Heartfelt Prayers”

Supplies needed: Bible, construction paper, scissors, pens/pencils.

Read together Psalm 17. Invite members of your household to cut out a paper heart from a sheet of 8-1/2” x 11” construction paper. On one side, copy verses 6 and 7. On the other side, encourage everyone to compose a prayer to God for someone who is in special need of God’s help. Conclude by reading 2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17 as a closing prayer.