

Sacramental Living

Job 19:23-27a

Psalm 17:1-9

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17

Luke 20:27-38

Have you ever felt like the world was ending? Remember Y2K when everyone was panicking about what would happen at midnight? Or 9-11, when grief and uncertainty locked the whole country in fear? We all remember covid, when the whole world came to a halt as we watched so many people die, always wondering who would be next? Many people have felt gripped by political and looming environmental apocalypses over the past few years. And beyond all the existential threats of life in the larger world, many of us have experienced personal tragedies, the loss of loved ones, and even the loss of our own agency as bodies change and the life we've known changes too. In one way or another, all our worlds will end. Part of life involves navigating its apocalypses.

Apocalypse always feels unprecedented, and while some are greater than others, and some are personal while others are more universal, the truth is that they always feel world ending. Job is the ultimate tale of weathering personal apocalypse. He lost all his children, all his livestock, all his wealth, then his body failed him, his wife turned against him, and his friends blamed him even though he had lived a faultless life. David's life is another one filled with cataclysmic pain, mostly regarding battles for his country, and the loss of three sons, one of whom first violently turned against him. The stories reflected in today's readings indicate that our forebearers understood the way it feels when our worlds collapse. They also show us a way to walk through the seeming end of our world and back into life.

Before we look at what they have to say, let us first tackle Jesus' encounter with the Sadducees. These men were trying to trap Jesus in a battle of wits. Never a good idea! Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection, so their question was an attempt to debunk Jesus' teachings about an afterlife and his assertions about his own resurrection. The

marital practice they cite was instituted by Moses. Remember, at that time, women were considered property, owned and protected by either their fathers or husbands. If a woman had left her father's household to marry and her husband died, she fell outside of society's provisions. She could own no property, nor work to sustain herself. This law was meant to provide for women who would otherwise be outcasts, disaffiliated from tribal identity, and powerless. Our sensibilities rebel against these ancient world's system, but it was within that context that the law was given. The argument the Sadducees made was an attempt to make Jesus' claim of resurrection seem silly.

They thought it was a good argument. After all, the only way they could imagine a resurrected world was through the lens of the world they inhabited. But Jesus said in the resurrection, life wouldn't be constrained by things that are normal to our earthly existence. Jesus says that after resurrection, there is no more death. And this is the point where his listeners at the time, and most of us here today, get confused.

Jesus goes on to say that people will be like the angels. He does not mean people become gauzy white, sprout wings, and don haloes. Angels exist outside of the constraints of both entropy and sin. So what Jesus means is that everything that structures earthly existence no longer applies. Angels exist solely to worship and serve God. They have various roles and individual identities, but those delineations make it possible for them to fully and freely live out their purpose in God's kingdom. At the last day, when Jesus remakes the world and reunites us with our resurrected bodies, we will be like the angles, freely and fully living into who God made us to be, unconstrained by laws meant to restrict sinful impulses.

Here's the distinction. Human life and society are entirely under the oppression of sin. Our more egalitarian world seems better to us than life under Moses' law, but our laws still exist to constrain the impacts of human sin. Everything we assume is normal about governance and the structures of human life on earth, even marriage, will be released

when those constraints are no longer required. Jesus isn't saying we can imagine what that will be like, because we can't. The point he is trying to communicate: is that we will LIVE! Life the way God intended, uncorrupted, abundant LIFE.

Every time we experience tragedy, a piece of us dies. Every year our bodies experience decline. This whole world suffers under the effects of sin, and we can't imagine what it will be like to live free from those realities. So, Jesus makes his point clearer by referencing the patriarchs. He says God is their God. Dead creatures do not have gods. God is the God of the living; meaning that the patriarchs, who are long since dead, are actually alive. They are alive in a realm we cannot see and will be made fully alive in their flesh at the resurrection of the dead. And since we can't fully understand any of that, and we grapple with believing it, let me highlight the significant thing. God cares about humans. We are not fully human without our bodies. God is deeply invested in our embodied lives and how we live in our bodies, in this life and the next. The reason resurrection matters is because it tells us how deeply God cares about LIFE.

When Job made his claim about the resurrection, his body was wasting away. In outrage at the injustice and pain, he ferociously laid claim to the certainty that, even though death was certain, in his **flesh** he would see and stand with God on a remade earth. That word for flesh literally means "meat". Physical stuff and physicality matter to God. When we feel shaken by life's pain, we can know that God feels it too. God feels it so much that God is committed to reclaiming and renewing it because God is the God of LIFE.

Life is a miracle. Breath is a gift. We are literally held in and animated by God's own self, by LIFE. That is true in this lifetime and in the resurrection. LIFE is sacred.

The definition of a sacrament is an outward, physical sign, of an internal grace. The fact that we are sitting here, physically breathing, is sacramental. Life proves grace. It is through our hands; God's presence is made evident in the world. Grace displays itself when our feet move us towards the needs of others, when our eyes hold the gaze of

another. No matter how much trauma, loss, or suffering we experience while we are breathing, no matter how much the pain can make us wish we were no longer breathing, the very fact of our existence is a sacrament.

Because we live in a sinful world, sometimes the presence of our fears and pain cast a shadow over our ability to see the outward and physical signs of God's grace. Sometimes the sacramental beauty of God's grace is shrouded. We get fatigued by the struggle, enraged by injustice, and we miss the sacred sacramentality of God's presence through our being alive, and we miss the opportunity to participate in it.

We must remember that God's commitment to life always assures our resurrection. Every time we experience loss, we have an opportunity to reclaim the grace of resurrection and then move into renewal. The very fact that we are here means that God's grace is present. When we notice grace, in that moment, we become a living sacrament. But choosing to live that way, especially when pain's shadow falls, does not happen on its own.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Thessalonians, that community was in a panic. The church was experiencing persecution, there was widespread fear that they had missed the "day of the Lord", and they were terrified about eschatological disaster. It seems like many people today feel that same looming sense of impending doom. Paul's instructions to his people are equally instructive to us. He offers three primary instructions. First, do not panic! We should anticipate the fear of existential threats and the pain of life on this earth, they will come, and so will resurrection. Do not be shaken. Second, give thanks. That one can be difficult, but far less so when we remember how dearly God prizes our lives. Our life is always secure in God. When we give thanks, we are affirming the presence of the grace of God, claiming the sacramentality of our life. And third, cling to the eternal comfort of God's presence. The fact that we are alive proves the presence of God. That presence will comfort our hearts and always lead us back again into resurrected life.

May we be a people who live into the resurrection by reclaiming every moment as a sacrament, making grace visible until we see God face to face.