“***My Redeemer Liveth****!*” by S. Finlan, at The First Church, Nov. 10, 2019

**Job 19:23-27a**

23 O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book!   
24 O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock for ever!

25 For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;   
26 and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then I shall see God [for myself],   
27 whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

**Luke 20:27-38**

Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him 28and asked “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. 29Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; 30then the second 31and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. 32Finally the woman died. 33In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.”

34 Jesus said to them, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; 35but 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. 36Indeed they cannot die any more, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. 37And 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. 38Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.”

Let’s start with Job. The background is that the Old Testament has very little teaching on the afterlife. It is simply ignored by the Torah and most of the prophets. But the author of the book of Job is willing to wrestle with the idea. First the character Job in the story has to confront the dominant belief of his time, which is that the underworld or Sheol is dim, dark, and dusty. Repeating the dominant view, Job says that the dead, young and old, “lie down alike in the dust, and the worms cover them” (21:26).

But Job rebels against this. He is suffering, and he needs better answers than the ones he is getting from his three friends who say that he must have sinned against God, or he would not be suffering. These shallow religious friends say that the only people who suffer are those who deserve it. One friend says “Is not your wickedness great?” (Job 22:5). But Job knows he does not deserve this much suffering, and also that many evil people seem to escape suffering. “Why do the wicked live on,” he asks, “and grow mighty in power?” (21:7). Job needs a better answer than the prosperity gospel that his friends offer. He says “How then will you comfort me with empty nothings?” (21:34). He is reaching out for an idea that transcends earth, and in chapters 14 and 19, he affirms a belief in an afterlife, as a rebuke to the problem of evil. It does not solve the problem of evil, but it certainly is an important partial answer. In this passage, Job starts by affirming the immortality of his words, and then moves to assert the immorality of his soul.

Here he shouts, “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 I shall see God [for myself]” (19:25–26). Job has a hard time holding on to this assertion as the book goes on, since he gets no support from any of the other characters in the play. His friends ignore his comment, and so does God when God shows up at the end. But Job’s inner spirit has enlightened him and pushed him to make this statement of faith.

In the teachings of Jesus, there is no doubt about the afterlife. The first thing to know is that the Sadducees are the priests, and they are very narrow and conservative. They study only the five books of the Torah, and do not believe in an afterlife. They are very different from the Pharisees, who read the Hebrew prophets and writings, including Isaiah and Daniel, where an afterlife is mentioned. But the Sadducees consider themselves superior to the Pharisees and don’t take their theology seriously. Here they ask an insincere question of Jesus. They spin a preposterous story where a woman outlives seven husbands, and no one asking why her husbands keep dropping like flies. The priests think they are very crafty, that Jesus cannot solve the problem they’ve raised. But he creates a teaching moment out of it. Jesus points out that people in this world may get married, but those who are “worthy of a place in . . . the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage”; rather, “they are like angels” (20:35–36), which means non-physical and non-sexual. The angels are embodied. They have bodies, but not *physical* ones. They have *spiritual* bodies, and we will, too, in the resurrection. We will have a bodily existence, but not a *physical* one, and not a sexual one. That’s hard for us to understand, of course, since we only know physical bodies here.

So that’s a straightforward teaching Jesus gives, for all who are listening. He follows this up with a crafty answer aimed at the Sadducees. Quoting the Torah, he uses the phrase “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (20:37), and forces them to admit that, if God is the God of the living, these patriarchs must still be alive. They were not willing to say that God is the God of the dead. So they were left speechless, unable “to ask him a question” (20:40). Jesus has gotten them to concede that at least these patriarchs must be alive in an afterlife.

But I don’t think the Sadducees *really* learn anything, because *sincerity* is the key to the kingdom, and these guys lack the key. People can learn *nothing* spiritual unless they have the key, which is sincerity. They are spiritually deaf, dumb, and blind. They are to be pitied, up to a point. But they are the ones who spearhead the murderous plot against Jesus, and at that point they lose all right to be pitied. The Sadducees are not the first nor the last group of hard-hearted religious bigots who betray everything for which they claim to stand, but they become the textbook example of religious bigotry.

It is better to be uncertain and struggling but sincere, like Job, than to be cocky but insincere, like the Sadducees. Therefore, sincerity links these two passages, although it is the *absence* of sincerity that stands out in the second story.

So cherish your own sincerity. It is the pearl of great price. It is simultaneously a sign of child-like purity and of mature loyalty to your values. How is that possible? Because of continuity. There is a pearl of great price within a faithful human heart that can start to blossom when one is young, and continue to blossom as one grows older. As we live, however, this goodness comes under assault from peer pressure and economic necessity, but even more from the forces of cynicism, insecurity, and fear. We see this in certain dictators, for instance. No matter how much power they accumulate, they become more and more afraid, paranoid, and violent as they age gracelessly. Cruelty grows on them like a fungus.

People are shaped by habit. This is true whether you’ve given in to cynicism and selfishness, or whether you have remained committed to a principle, have retained your pearl of great value despite the world’s pressure, in resistance to the voice of cynicism. The heart of faith knows that God is real, even if God’s ways are not always clear. The faithful person can say “I am a child of God. I know that I am somehow connected to God, and so connected to everyone else who is connected to God! I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that at the end, I shall see God!”