

Sermon for the 24th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C [Armistice Day]  
11.xi.2007, 10:00 Holy Communion • ELW Service of the Word  
Job 19:23-27a; Psalm 17:1-9; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17; Luke 20:27-38  
Saint James the Apostle Evangelical Lutheran Church / Brogue, Pennsylvania

# J. J.!

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was  
and Who is to come. ☩ Amen.

**... but 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. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. And 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. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."**

**--Luke 20:35-38**

All of today's readings from Scripture are about the Biblical view of eternal life. The Apostle Paul's two letters to the Church at Thessalonika, probably the earliest writings in the entire New Testament, are Paul's answers to questions he had received from those Christians about death and what to expect beyond the gate of death. We can

see how Paul's thought on this develops from the First to the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, and indeed throughout his letters to the various Christian centers with which he was associated.

Christians of every age have wondered the same thing and have asked the same question. Particularly during and following times of war and all of its terrible destruction, a great aching emptiness cries out to Heaven for an answer.

'Why did they have to die? What has become of them?'

The Book of Job represents a turning point in Israel's belief in life beyond this life. In Job, the righteous man who endures all things faithfully—not even identified as a Hebrew—declares his hope in the vision of God beyond this life, that even after death he shall stand bodily in the presence of God forever. The new vision of the Book of Job was not accepted by all in Israel.

The Sadducees, an aristocratic class with blood ties to the Davidic line, represented an earlier tradition of Jewish belief which held to the eternity of the Almighty alone, to the eternal Covenant of the LORD with Israel and, on that basis, to the endurance of the Covenant people until the end of all things on the Day of the LORD. They did not accept the newer, Pharisaic belief in a resurrection of individuals to eternal life in the realm of heaven or eternal punishment in the realm of ‘Sheol,’ Hades or hell. That belief was fraught with too many logical inconsistencies, the Sadducees thought, absurdities like the question of marriage in eternity following separation in this life by death or divorce.

The conundrum with which they try to trip up Jesus in today’s Gospel would have been a stock question they would have used on any Pharisee, on any of the new

movement of righteous teachers, ‘Rabbis,’ who were preaching and teaching a renewal of Jewish life through obedience to the Law and through hope in the coming Kingdom of Heaven. I doubt that the Sadducees in today’s Gospel harbored any particular malice toward this young Rabbi from Nazareth. They were just having some fun with this newcomer, with this yokel from the Galilee basin. Would that we had access to writings that recorded their discussions after hearing the answer Our LORD gave them.

The Sadducees assume in their question that Jesus is naïve and self-deluded, and that He, like the Egyptians and all other ancient peoples not enlightened by the Law of Moses, believes in a heaven of the resurrection that is simply a continuation of this life. That is what the Egyptians believed in their religion called ‘Kemet.’ The life of Pharaoh and his family, and of all who served the

royal house, was believed to be heaven on earth, and heaven, for the Egyptians, was seen simply as Egypt, eternal Egypt forever and ever. Every of Jesus' day would have known that, regardless of whether he had ever seen an Egyptian or spoken with one. The Egyptians made life a thing of beauty in their highest of all cultures in the ancient Near East. At least it was a thing of beauty for the ruling elites. They loved and worshipped this life with the Nile at its center. Their gods and goddesses were the mirror images of themselves. To believe in the immortality of individuals in any sense would have seemed to the Sadducees, as right-believing Hebrews, to accept the error and self-delusion of the Egyptians and to forget the all-important distinction between the *one* God and the world, a distinction which becomes most obvious at the hour of death.

But Our LORD does *not* teach that the life to come is simply a continuation of this life. No, the normal business of this life is not simply going to go on and on as we live in God's presence. No, people are not going to simply living within those structures and institutions that define us and protect us now, structures such as family or marriage or nationality or what have you. In the relationships of this life, particularly where sexuality enters the equation, there simply must be limits and defined expectations where the dignity of both men and women and the security of children is to be preserved. But there is coming a time beyond time, in a body beyond this body, when the imperfect loves and the anxieties of this life will be left behind and that pure love of which poets and composers have written so movingly will permeate the universe. There is coming a light beyond this darkness in which God's glory will be

seen not only in imperfect, reflected form, through what God has made, not only in those glimmers of courage and self-giving love in the midst of war and destruction, reflecting the extent to which the Father loves us in the sacrifice of His own and only Son, but a day is coming in which the light of God will be seen as it *is*, an eternal day without night which we will have new eyes to see what our blindness now cannot begin to imagine, that light in which the Angels serve constantly. And on that day we shall become like the Angels, yet also different from them, for our bodies and the body of the whole world has been sanctified forever by the Incarnation of the One Who entered our world as a tiny infant, Who now reigns at the very center of that great Light forever.

Life beyond this life is *not* simply a continuation, except in one sense: That which was begun in us through

God's grace in Holy Baptism, that means whereby you and I are included in Israel's everlasting Covenant with the LORD, is that about us which is already eternal. As we live out of our Baptism, as we claim our new life in Christ as our *real* life, our hope has already been fulfilled. ✠ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever! ✠ Amen.

**S. D. G.!**