November 10, 2019
Pentecost 22
I Know That My Redeemer Lives
Job 19:23-27a
Psalm 17:1-9
2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17
Christ the King Lutheran Church, Tigard, OR
The Rev. Dorothy Cottingham

Fellow ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,
Gracia y paz de Dios; Padre, Hijo y Espíritu Santo
Grace and peace from God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Happy Resurrection Day! It feels like Easter Sunday the lyrics of the hymns; the lessons, especially Job. Today is all about resurrection.

As we near the end of the Church Year, just two more weeks, we turn our attention from the challenges and struggles of this age to the joy and victory of that age. Jesus has a lot to say about this present age, especially as retold by Luke. The Temple leaders were not happy with the hope-filled message Jesus was giving to the crowds. They weren't happy that Jesus was drawing crowds. So, some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came and asked Jesus a trick question.

The Sadducees were the elite of the elite in the Temple hierarchy. They not only kept everything running in the temple, they were cozied up to the Roman Empire’s elite. They were afraid that this traveling Rabbi was riling up the Empire and risking the delicate agreement between the rulers of Empire and the rulers of Temple.

Jesus’s teachings about resurrection were puzzling to those who heard them. At the same time, they were liberating. The teacher was promising the end of oppression and injustice. The Sadducees did not want to hear about a day when the politics of the day would be overturned in favor of God’s politics. They could not allow that kind of hope. And that’s what led them to ask this question.

In their effort to trip him up, instead of asking Jesus a profound question about the nature of the kingdom of God, or about the restoration of Israel, they asked a question that is a cross between how many angels can fit on the head of a pin and how many Lutherans it change a light bulb. They were probably surprised by the answer. Jesus drew a distinction between those who belong to this age and those who have a place in that age…in the resurrection.

Scholars have debated the first question for millennia – angels dancing on a pin – The answer to the second is easy: “it only takes one Lutheran to change a light bulb, but the lightbulb has to really want to change”.

Anyway, the Sadducees didn’t believe in resurrection, so they posed this question of one-bride-for-seven-brothers as a trap. Jesus sets them straight…Resurrection is a wholly new, unparalleled state of being. There has been nothing like this, ever! The resurrection will not be like the current life. There will be no institutions or contracts – marriage or anything else. Resurrection is beyond anything that we can imagine.

Despite the life-after-death bestsellers, like Eben Alexander’s “Proof of Heaven”, or the Left Behind series, what happens to us after death is a mystery, an incomprehensible reality that is grounded in God’s love and faithfulness.
When my sister was diagnosed with cancer and told that the end of her life was imminent, she told me that she was not afraid to die because she knew where she was going. The two things that puzzled her were, what it would feel like to cross from this life to eternal life and would she recognize our mom and dad and they her. I admitted I didn’t know. But, what I DO know is this promise from Jesus: the only relationship that will matter in heaven is our relationship with the God.

And, Jesus says, THIS God, this Holy One of whom Moses spoke is the God of the living, including our ancestors in the faith, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Whether we are living in this age or in the next, God is the only indestructible, imperishable reality.

Trusting this, we come over and over to this table to remember that Jesus was betrayed, arrested, died and lives again. That’s right! Jesus lives. The victory is won! Present tense.

We are resurrection people. We are, as my dad said over and over, Easter people. In spite of what sometimes feels like insurmountable obstacles, we can claim a living and active God. We can claim a God who cares for all of creation, the poor, the widow, the orphan. A God who cares for us, individually and collectively. It took me a long time to feel this reality in my gut!

Think of all the saints in glory. Think of the people you love who have died, the names we read out loud last week. Now imagine that they are alive, singing and dancing and praising God right now. Listen to the words of the communion preparation, the proper preface: “and so with all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn…” It is your invitation to join in the unending, living praise of all believers throughout history in heaven and on earth.

For now, we are people of this generation, this time and place. We are called to be the people of God, visible and active. We are called to give comfort and healing to our neighbors; speak truth to the power of Empire; encourage and invite the lonely, heartbroken and lost into something new. We are called to celebrate Easter resurrection every day. And, while we wait for the ultimate resurrection, we sing with confidence “I know that my Redeemer lives”. Right now! Today and every day!

Thanks be to God.