

Proper 27, Year C

- Next year, God willing and the Bishop consenting, I expect we'll celebrate a seven week Advent
- Expand Advent by three weeks so that it will essentially begin now
- Which will really just give us a little bit more time to focus on one of the most important – maybe even the most important – season of the year
- Because our whole lives are basically Advent – our whole lives are basically lived in anticipation of what comes next
- And what's more, these next three Sundays, those “extra” Sundays in a 7 week Advent already have an Advent flavor – the readings already set us up for the season of preparation for the Incarnation of God – that first time in a manger, and also that second time
- The time when Christ will come again and no one knows the day or the hour
- You can see it in today's collect where we pray that God will “Grant that... we may purify ourselves as [Christ] is pure; that, when he comes again with power and great glory, we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom”
- All of these Sundays hint at and prefigure the time when all creation will meet the end for which it has always been intended
- None moreso, perhaps, than this reading from the Book of Job
- “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 in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.”
- I know I say this a lot, but that's easily one of the best passages of Scripture of all time
- So good, in fact, that we've incorporated it into our burial liturgy – that liturgy that is so good, so powerful a proclamation of Resurrection that I think it is one of the greatest gifts the Anglican tradition has to offer the world
- And right at the beginning, in the opening anthem, right after we echo Christ's words saying, “I am Resurrection and I am Life”, we say these words:
- “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth.”
- It is, I'm tempted to say, one of the most basic tenets of our faith, the Good News that our Redeemer lives – and in light of that knowledge, our lives are meant to be radically different from the way that they otherwise might be
- And to be fair, sometimes they are – more often than not, though, we don't live as though

we know that our Redeemer lives

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- There is another rite in the Episcopal Church known as the Reconciliation of a Penitent, though it's perhaps more commonly called Confession and Absolution
- It's not identical to the rite called Confession in the Roman Catholic Church, though it's similar enough that that can give you something of an idea
- But I always stress that it's not merely called Confession, try to always refer to it as either the Rite of Reconciliation or Confession **and Absolution** because the point of it is that reconciliation, that moment of absolution wherein we are reminded once more that we are reconciled to God
- That is the moment in the rite when we hear that the sins that we hold so heavily and so close – the imperfections and mistakes we think we're going to have to live with forever – we hear that those are forgiven – washed clean – forgotten
- We hear that God forgives us our sins, that we are reconciled
- And one of the most common reactions is a sense of disbelief, maybe even denial – people just can't quite fathom that the sins we think are so heavy can be forgiven so easily by God
- Because when it comes to our reconciliation with God, when it comes to our sins, maybe we forget that our Redeemer lives, that sin and death have no more sway over us
- And that's only the most common reaction, of course, among people who actually take part in the rite of reconciliation – because most Anglicans and Episcopalians actually won't ever undertake the rite in their lives
- Because we don't offer it nearly enough in our churches, and when we do, I think we feel like it's something we can't really do or shouldn't really do
- We don't want to be that vulnerable, maybe, or don't want to confront the sins we've committed, even in order to find out that they've been forgiven
- As though we don't know that our Redeemer lives
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- In both those liturgies, and really in all of our Episcopal liturgies, the last thing to take place is the dismissal, where we are told to go in peace, or to go forth in the name of Christ, or to go in peace to love and serve the Lord
- And every one of these dismissals are intended to be a sending – a recognition that as our worship in this place ends, our self-offering and our worship continues, not only in here, with our lips and bodies, but out there, in our lives

- And so often, when we leave the cozy confines of these walls, our lives are lived according to the same rules as everyone else, as though we don't know that our Redeemer lives
- Maybe we do it by acting like this life is all there is – we let fear or totally natural impulses like self-preservation or the pressure to fit in make us do things that society says we should rather than what we could
- Maybe we try to get ahead or to achieve the definition that the world out there holds of success
- Or we worry that we don't have enough, that someone else is going to get what's ours – maybe something simple, like our spot in line or our place in traffic where two lanes merge
- Or maybe we worry about something complex, like how much other people are really contributing to society, compared to us or whatever standard we have fixed in our mind
- We worry about the kind of things that shouldn't really matter – don't really matter – because our Redeemer lives
- We hold on so tightly to our own sins, carrying their weight around with us, and hating them when we see them in other people, hating the reminder of the sins that we can't let go of because we forget what God has already done with them
- We neglect to love our neighbors as ourselves, or to treat others as we would wish to be treated, out of fear that there just isn't enough to go around
- Or we live our lives in fear that our next breath may be our last, because we know that on our own we can't sustain ourselves, can't save ourselves, and so we think that we have to squeeze every last drop out of this life because one is all we get and when it's up, that's it
- And maybe that would be good enough, if our God were not alive, had not been made flesh to walk among us, was not coming again to redeem us, redeem this world, redeem everything in it, once and for all
- “But as for us, we know that our Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth. After our awaking, he will raise us up; and in our body we shall see God. We ourselves shall see, and our eyes behold him who is our friend and not a stranger.”