

Remembrance Sunday Year C 2019

*Without controversy, great is the mystery of Godliness;
God was manifested in the Flesh, justified by the Spirit, seen of angels,
proclaimed among the Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory:
In whom is hid all the Treasures of Wisdom and knowledge.*

These words form the Preface to the original score of Messiah by Handel and were chosen by Charles Jennens – taken from I Timothy and Colossians. Jennens wants us to know from the start of his texts that in Jesus is to be found the answer to any question of humanity that has ever or ever will be asked – all the treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge. With great skill, Jennens draws from both Old and New Testaments to create the libretto - a powerful reflection on the Christ – the Messiah - leading us through the Nativity, Ministry, Passion and Death of the Lord. The Resurrection and Ascension are alluded to before we reach the Halleluiah Chorus – a wondrous shout of joy where Jesus is acclaimed as King of Kings and Lords of Lords.

It is after this that we hear the words from our Old Testament reading this morning:
*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.*

These words, which have been precious to so many people of faith over thousands of years, seem to me to be earth shaking in their relationship to the journey of faith. Indeed, the whole Book of Job reflects the human experience - a profound reflection on life, suffering and justice. At its heart, however, is the knowledge of God's Love for humanity and creation, together with the freedom we choose; whether we desire a relationship within this love or not. At the start the writer represents a discussion between God and Satan discussing the question of this freedom. 'Surely,' says Satan, 'people will only love God because of what they think he can do for them.' Where is the freedom in this? Humanity, if it has any sense and believes in this all creative, loving God, will be obliged to love God! Yet what follows in the book is a creative testing of this understanding – one which reveals the absolute freedom of Faith.

Job is tested beyond all measure. To others he seems cursed rather than blessed. At the point we reach in today's reading he is almost at the end of his tether on many fronts. He feels abandoned by those who should love him. Yet he reveals that God remains the lodestar of his life. Even after all that has happened to him which has caused his distress, pain and anger, he knows that more than anything else that he wants to stand in the presence of the living God, to know that his Redeemer lives. Even in the catastrophe of all he has experienced, Job knows that he has been accompanied by God. All he desires to confirm is that God is on his side. The powerful message to Job and us is that God's presence on our journey never has (or ever will) rely on a grovelling, scared-witless blind adherence of faith, but the knowledge of the divine accompaniment on every step of our journey – this is the freedom found in God's Love.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus faces the Sadducees in their challenging him to question a basic tenet of their understanding of faith – a refusal to accept any understanding of resurrection

from the dead. Jesus responds in a magisterial way which confounds their rather sly approach. Their question about the Mosaic responsibilities of family, particularly in terms of bereavement is met with a riposte that demolishes their own crass reasoning. His answer causes us to ponder our own journey into the heart of God's Love after death vis-à-vis our relationship to those we love. He plays the Sadducees at their own game, pointing out that they are trivialising the very nature of God and humanity's place within that divine love.

Jesus draws on the whole sweep of Divine revelation when he talks of 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob – the God of the living not the dead.' This points to the very centre of our Faith: that God cherishes the whole of creation and humanity without exception. As I have said before, God cannot possibly love you any more than he does at this moment, no matter what. The fulness of understanding the depth of this love is found in the face of Jesus Christ, who, like Job, felt also abandonment on the cross of Calvary, yet ultimately revealed the reassurance that no matter what we experience on life's journey, God has been there before; from birth, life, suffering and death. The cross draws us to the fulness of Resurrection life. Paul uses the imagery of the Bible when he says, 'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.'

On this day when we remember those who gave their lives so that we might live in freedom, we remember the cost of their sacrifice. As they dwell in the heart of Divine Love let us (in the eloquent words of Eric Milner-White) *remember before God all those who rejoice with us, but upon another shore and in a greater light, that multitude which no one can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, and with whom we for evermore are one.*

Through Jesus we have the knowledge that God desires us to know that in **him** we know the fulness of life – life which transcends death - and offers each of us comfort and hope beyond all else.



Job 19: 23-27a

'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 in my flesh I shall see God,
²⁷ whom I shall see on my side,^[a]
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

2 Thessalonians 2: 1-5, 13-end;

2 As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters,^[a] ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. ³ Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one^[b] is revealed, the one destined for destruction.^[c] ⁴ He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God. ⁵ Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you?

¹³ But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters^[d] beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits^[e] for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news,^[f] so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers and sisters,^[g] stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.

¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

Luke 20: 27-38

²⁷ Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him ²⁸ and asked him a question, '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. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; ³⁰ then the second ³¹ and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. ³² Finally the woman also died. ³³ In 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; ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ Indeed they cannot die any more, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. ³⁷ 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. ³⁸ Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.'