

“Redemption”

Job 19:23-27

Psalm 17:1-9

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17

Luke 20:27-38

It is an innate human quality to reminisce on the past as a better time than the present. We all do it. Elementary school was better when we sang a patriotic song, said a prayer, and then recited the pledge of allegiance. Those were the good ole days. When we hanker for the past, we desire redemption from the now and the future.

The journey of discipleship has moments of redemption. In August 2016, I preached for a congregation, which was the church at which I did my field education internship while attending Fuller Theological Seminary. The congregation is just a shell of what it used to be. It was great to reconnect with folk, and the past was fun to remember. Then the sanctuary was always packed, high energy was palpable, and great enthusiasm for reaching others with the good news of Jesus Christ pervaded congregant conversations. Now, any given Sunday has less than thirty in attendance, limited energy, and low passion for evangelism. Is it helpful to pine for the past when facing a difficult present? Do we really think the past can bring redemption today?

The texts in Job 19:23-27, Psalm 17:1-9, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17, and Luke 20:27-38 have similar contexts. The past seems more attractive than the present.

Job 19:23-27a depicts Job banking his hope on God’s faithfulness. Job does not want all that was taken away, restored. To the contrary, Job wants someone to defend his innocence and restore his honor before God. Job does not know that Satan made a challenge to God that he didn’t love God but only wanted the “stuff” God provided. God

said that was untrue and allowed Satan to do anything to Job but kill him. Job's friends were the ones that told him he had done something wrong and to curse God and die. Job would have none of that. Job 19:25 reads, "For I know that my redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth." Job becomes the advocate.

Psalm 17:1-9 continues the theme in Job that an advocate plead the case for innocence and honor being restored by God since there was no deceit, fraud, or disbelief in God on his part. Psalm 17:1 reads, "Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry; give ear to prayer from lips free of deceit."

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17 continues the theme in Job that an advocate, plead the case for innocence and honor being restored by God since there was no deceit, fraud, or disbelief in God on his part. In our case, we must plead our case being motivated by tradition and the Holy Spirit. When tradition and the Holy Spirit are properly linked, they bring life, comfort, and hope. There is redemption from troubled times that tell us to retrench. No matter how difficult times become for the church, followers of Jesus are not to think Jesus is coming the next day to spare us the difficulties facing us. We are to remain faithful and connected to the vision Jesus has for the redemption and salvation of all creation. 2 Thessalonians 2:15,17 reads, "So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself...comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word."

Luke 20:27-38 continues the theme in Job that an advocate plead the case for innocence and honor being restored by God since there was no deceit, fraud, or disbelief in God on his part. In our case, we must plead our case being motivated by a keen

understanding of resurrection. In answering the Sadducees trick question, Jesus teaches that marriage is not a necessary relationship for all people, nor will marriage be something we are given to in heaven. The Sadducees do not really care about resurrection. They want to trap Jesus with Moses' teaching that if a husband dies leaving his wife a widow, and there are other brothers in the husband's family, a brother must marry the widow. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not just revered citizens of a great heritage, but they are citizens of an age where God has triumphed over death. Their lives speak today to the truth of the resurrection. How the church takes care of the widows and downtrodden is a statement of citizenship. When we do it well, continue to give and love in tough times, it is because of our living in the strength of Christ's resurrection. Luke 20:37-38 reads, "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."¹

Although we pine for the way things were in the church, it is dangerous to think that a return to the past will alleviate the pains of the present. The present state of the church is troubling. There seem to be two types. Consumer centered and emptied parking lots and pews. A return to a program centered church won't cut it unless we want to be consumer driven. A third way is what we are attempting at Geneva. That is being

¹In all five paragraphs of textual analysis, I have benefited from the thinking of Lydia Hernandez-Marcial, Lauren F. Winner, Kimberly Bracken Long, Matt Gaventa, Edith M. Humphrey, Patrick J. Willson, and Kenyatta R. Gilbert in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery and Cynthia L. Rigby, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 460-462, 465-468, 469-471, 471-473, 474-476, and 476-477.

authentically intergenerational with real intergenerational friendships. But we need a radical change in heart in our understanding and experience of giving and loving, of being church, in troubled times.

Yes, times are perplexing, and the past looks attractive. Thom Rainer writes, “A church without a gospel-centered purpose is no longer a church at all.”² Recognize the toxins in your life and our faith community that deplete your redemption as a follower of Jesus, your discipleship. Here are a few: recognize the slow erosion in your experience of Christian community; build Geneva Presbyterian Church into a community of faith that looks like the community; practice the Sermon on the Mount, the Great Commission; and Matthew 25; and have a clear purpose of being church not going through the motions of church.

Give and love motivated by tradition and the Holy Spirit. Give and love motivated by a keen understanding of resurrection. God’s ways and will, will change your experience of tithing from your cognitive, affective, physical, spiritual, and financial resources from your life wallet. The journey of discipleship has moments of redemption. Lean into Geneva’s Vision. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations)
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²Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 75.