

# The Lessons Appointed for Use on the Sunday closest to November 9



Proper 27  
Year C  
RCL

Job 19:23-27a  
Psalm 17:1-9  
Luke 20:27-38

## The Collect

The Collect

O God, whose blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life: Grant that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves as he is pure; that, when he comes again with power and great glory, we may be made like

him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**Job 19:23-27a**

Job said,

“O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book!

O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock forever!

For 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.”

**Psalm 17:1-9**

- 1 Hear my plea of innocence, O LORD; give heed to my cry; \* listen to my prayer, which does not come from lying lips.
- 2 Let my vindication come forth from your presence; \* let your eyes be fixed on justice.
- 3 Weigh my heart, summon me by night, \* melt me down; you will find no impurity in me.
- 4 I give no offense with my mouth as others do; \* I have heeded the words of your lips.
- 5 My footsteps hold fast to the ways of your law; \* in your paths my feet shall not stumble.
- 6 I call upon you, O God, for you will answer me; \* incline your ear to me and hear my words.
- 7 Show me your marvelous loving-kindness, \* O Savior of those who take refuge at your right hand from those who rise up against them.
- 8 Keep me as the apple of your eye; \* hide me un-

der the shadow of your wings,  
9 From the wicked who assault me, \* from my  
deadly enemies who surround me.

**Luke 20:27-38**

Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus 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. Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; then the second and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.”

Jesus said to them, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; 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.”

## SERMON

What is our proper relationship to God? And who is this God person, anyway? The Revised Common Lectionary has been subtly focusing our minds on these questions for the past couple of weeks, beginning with the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt them-



selves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

In Jesus’ parable, it is the tax collector, a man roundly hated in his time as a villain, who has found the right relationship with God, not the professional religious person who imagines that he knows all about God and proudly celebrates his relationship to a God that, honestly, he has created.

Last Sunday, the Lectionary asked us to look at the evil within – the ways we grant ourselves freedom to hate, for instance, even though the Scriptures clearly teach otherwise:

Do not gloat when your enemy falls;  
when they stumble, do not let your heart rejoice,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 24:17

And

If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat;  
if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.<sup>2</sup>

And, most clearly:

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies...

This Sunday, we are given an opportunity to look at the ways we convince ourselves by clever argument that we know that which we have not the power to know – God in his suchness.

some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus 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

<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 25:21

up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; then the second and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.”

The irony is that the Sadducees are explaining God to God’s own Son. We’ve got the most human problem imaginable – who is this God person we are to relate to, and how do we do it? Is it all about a list of “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not”? Is being obedient more of a practice than a legal proceeding? Does it involve specific worship forms? This is a creedal church. Each Sunday, we affirm our faith from the Apostle’s Creed. The church which extends my credentials, the Christian

Church, Disciples of Christ, is non-creedal. It opposes any attempt to summarize faith in a creed. Is one right and the other wrong?

Truth is, those called to a religious life want to be obedient, but since our human minds are too limited to contain God, we are forced to make up a shorthand God consistent with our understanding. For some, it's an accommodating God who does things for us. (I've known people who actually pray to God for victory for their high school football team!) For others, it's a scary God who does things TO us. Doesn't matter. The resulting approximation is not God – it is a simplification of God with which we can work.

Let's try an experiment. When I say, "God", I'll

bet that everyone here gets a mental image of an old man dressed in robes on a throne. Where did that come from? For the first 1,100 years of the church's existence and for a thousand years before, it was strictly verboten depict God's likeness. The Book of Exodus tells us clearly:

Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see Me and live

And John reminds us:

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

No one has ever seen God, but WE all know what He looks like. If I told you that I had been granted a vision (and I am not going to tell you any such thing. I like my job here) revealing to me that

God really “looks” like a ten year old girl named Mary Martha Johnson, you’d be up here with pitchforks and torches. We’ve hammered God into a mold of our own making and we demand that He stay there. That’s why the coming of Jesus caused such upset in His community. God incarnate as a poor man from the sticks was too great a leap — so great a leap, indeed, that the people of the time got their backs up and nailed Him to a cross. That’s how important our mental images of God is to us, because once we have constructed a viable approximation of God, then we feel we can speak for Him, and that’s just what the Sadducees undertook to do – explain to Jesus, of all people, that there is no resurrection. Oscar Wilde included a really

funny scene about the wrong sort of relationship to God in his play “Salome”. Herod has heard reports that Jesus of Nazareth has been raising the dead.

“I do not wish him to do that,” says Herod. “I forbid him to do that. I allow no man to raise the dead. This man must be found and told that I forbid him to raise the dead.”

That really captures us at our stubborn worst. It’s where the dizzying numbers of denominations come from. Everybody has their own idea of who or what this God person is, and once we’ve formed that idea, we can’t be pried from it. Worse yet, we are very likely to mistake His offer of forgiveness for permission to act contrary even to His commandments! That is where things like wars and

support for the death penalty come from. Thou shalt not kill, unless there's a really good reason, or one which appeals to you.

The fact of the matter is that there is only one way to worship God with us, God incomprehensible, and that is the way of the tax collector

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'

Don't even look up to heaven, church, but confess your limitations. Admit that God is greater than your ideas about God. You are His. He is not yours. Abandon your attempts to define God, be repentant, not puffed up pridefully at your practices, and pray,



God, be merciful to me, a sinner!

Only then, only if you can lay aside your pride and admit your powerlessness can you receive God's blessings.

AMEN

## BENEDICTION

The regal old man on the throne did not come to depict God until the 12<sup>th</sup> Century — 1,100 years after the time of Jesus. Until then, it was considered improper to represent God artistically. I think there was wisdom in that. We allow ourselves to get too chummy with our approximations of God and thus we rob ourselves of awareness of God's mystery and power.

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be  
gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and  
give you peace.

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Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and

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