**John 20:1-18**

20Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. 2So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” 3Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10Then the disciples returned to their homes.

11But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” 14When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” 16Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). 17Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” 18Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

**Job 19:25-27**

 25 I know that my Redeemer lives,
       and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.

 26 And after my skin has been destroyed,
       yet in my flesh I will see God;

 27 I myself will see him
       with my own eyes—I, and not another.
       How my heart yearns within me!

“I Know My Redeemer Lives”

The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee

April 9, 2023 – Easter Sunday

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the mediations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I can remember the excitement that would come over me each spring, when my mother would let me know we were going to Plainfield the following Saturday. In Plainfield, NJ, we would go to the Pepperidge Farm outlet store and buy corn and molasses bread, and if we were lucky, also some cinnamon swirl. This was a special treat I had to look forward to just about once a year, on the day that we would go to redeem our S&H Green Stamps. Remember Green Stamps? Oh, and just in case you thought they were entirely a thing of the distant past, you should know that until 2020 you could register for S&H Greenpoints online. I checked it out last week when I began to think seriously about redemption. You see, the first time I ever thought about redeeming had nothing to do with Jesus.

Redemption to me meant turning in little pieces of sweet tasting, sticky paper in return for some highly necessary kitchen utensil—like an electric knife. *Now*, there are signs up on a back road near where I used to live in Belmont that say “Redemption Center, $.06/can.” That extra penny probably adds up to a lot for people who collect cans as part of their livelihood. They exchange their cans for money. Somehow, though, we can be sure that these are not the redeemer that Job turns to in the 19th chapter of our scripture.

Job—who in the passages just prior to those we’ve heard this morning had just described himself as having flesh entirely wasted away, and nothing but skin and bone left—Job is looking for the redemption of his body and of his apparently sinful soul. You may be familiar with the multitude of afflictions that Job has borne, and we might understand proclamations of faith*less*ness where we hear instead testimony to his belief in God’s redeeming love. Wow! That is a faith worth emulating.

A lot of people speculate that Job was prophetically looking toward Jesus as redeemer, but we can’t know this for certain. For Job, we can learn a sense of God as redeemer who could deliver him from physical torment, one who could offer him physical relief. Sometimes, that is all we feel like we really need.

It was many years ago that I first began repeating today’s sermon title as a kind of a repetitive prayer during Lent. During Holy Week while I was in serminary, there was a free broadcast on satellite t.v. of a wide variety of Easter music. Included in it was a song by a woman named Nicole C. Mullen that moved me to tears—and moved me to track down the next time it would be aired so that I could tape it. Every time I had to offer devotions for classes that spring, I would bring the tape to play. You see, there was something about the way that she sang the simple phrase, “I know my Redeemer lives” that made this idea of redemption new to me. *Her* joy made me wonder how to find that kind of joy for myself. I was already in seminary, already felt as though I knew something about Christian salvation and the theology of the cross, and I learned a tremendous new lesson.

“I know my Redeemer lives!” We proclaim today that Jesus Christ is risen, and I am here to tell you that this is remarkable news! Do you know how remarkable this is? That Jesus rose from the dead two thousand plus years ago defies anything we can know without faith, and that is reason for celebration. We know that in Jesus, the bonds of death have been broken. God entered into the world in the infant Jesus, and through his ministry proceeded to turn upside down *everything* we know about what this world contains. Finally, Jesus was raised from the dead.

But you know, when I hear the refrain of Mullen’s song, “He lives,” I know something even greater. The resurrection of Jesus was not a once-in-a-lifetime event. *Job* wrote that he knew he would see God face to face—with his own eyes, in his own flesh. Jesus’ disciples, beginning with Mary, saw Jesus after he had risen. They celebrated the truth of what Jesus had prophesied to them, and they celebrated what it would mean to their lives thereafter. Jesus had been crucified, but through Jesus’ death on the cross, everyone who believes in him has been and will be redeemed.

So, we’re back to being redeemed. Only now, *we* are being redeemed, and maybe you, like I, wonder what this means. I don’t remember turning myself in for something lately. There’s no deposit stamp on my forehead and no prizes to be garnered when I cross the threshold of some store. Or is there? Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Lord, *has redeemed us*, and this is in two really important senses of the word. Like Job, and as the lyrics of Mullen’s song can remind us, “The very same God that spins things in orbit runs to the weary, the worn and the weak.” God *will and does* help us carry our physical hurts and emotional pain. Mullen goes on to sing, “and the same gentle hands that hold me when I'm broken, they conquered death to bring me victory.” And isn’t that the tremendous news of this day. In Jesus Christ, God has conquered death. But it doesn’t stop there. Through Jesus, *we* are brought to victory! We, who are tempted, tried, and who so often fail; we, who could never on our own *deserve* a place with our Creator God and our Lord; we are brought to victory. So, there are prizes to be had after all—the greatest prize of all, eternal life! And what have we done to deserve this? Well, by God’s grace we don’t have to do anything at all, except believe. In the other and now wonderful sense of redemption, an exchange has been made. Jesus has done all the work for us, because Jesus became one of us, lived among us, and died *for* us. Best of all, Jesus rose from the dead! God did this *for us*, because on our own we cannot do it for ourselves.

Jesus Christ is risen today! And with Nicole C. Mullen I hope that we might be moved to sing, “let all creation testify! Let this life within me cry! I know my redeemer lives!” May our words, may our deeds, may our very lives testify that we know our redeemer lives! Alleluia!