

## Death - why pretend?

Job 19<sup>23-27a</sup>; Psalm 171<sup>1-9</sup>; 2 Thessalonians 2<sup>1-5,13-17</sup>; Luke 20<sup>27-38</sup>

*He is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.. [Luke 20<sup>38</sup>]*

It is very tempting to have a rant about Halloween - what on earth makes anyone think that dressing as a decomposing corpse, or a skeleton, or a witch, or anything else of that ilk is entertaining? Using that to extort money from people is little more than extortion. I am resisting the temptation (but I did want you to be clear about how I felt!). I am just a grump who happens to think that trivialising real spiritual issues for entertainment is not only distasteful but dangerous!

The themes from the readings for this morning follow up on the sermon from last week - they are exploring the hope that Christians have for beyond this life: that in itself is the antidote to Halloween.

The problem is often that we want details we cannot secure. We can imagine what something can be like, but with no experience of it we can not be certain. I tried to think of things that push the boundaries - the first time for a confirmed sailor to use the Channel Tunnel; the first time on an all-inclusive holiday; abseiling; space travel may be one for the future!

The fact is (unless you know something that I don't) is that none of us here have any experience of being dead and staying dead. Neither do the writers we encounter in Scripture today, but:

- ✦ Job has been tested - the victim of a wager between God and Satan. Here is the great moment when his faith is declared **I know that my redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has thus been destroyed, then un my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.** He accepts the fact of decomposition, BUT holds out that the life beyond it is as real as flesh.
- ✦ Paul recognises that any teaching about the end of the world, about judgement or life after death can be disturbing. Some preachers seem more concerned about surviving the apocalypse than they are about living day to day. I was always warned that I could not attend a place of secular entertainment - the cinema; the theatre; a disco; a pub; etc - because if Jesus

returned when I was in there I would be left behind! Avoid nutters like this - trust what Paul says about God: **stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught.** These are summed up in the final verses of the chapter as **love, grace, comfort, hope** and **strengthening.** If that isn't the sum total of your faith and you end up in fruitless debates on the millennium and the tribulation, or the exact form of the resurrection body, rather than living out God's love in anticipation of living in it in heaven you have missed the point!

- ✦ Luke records Jesus being challenged by a Sadducee - he wanted to prove his view that the resurrection didn't happen. The tradition that if a man died his brother then had to marry his widow is taken to extremes with 7 brothers dying in turn (I think the woman should have married the funeral director who could by now afford to keep her!). The *killer* question was therefore **in the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be?** Jesus answer is clear: **at the resurrection the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage.** He then goes on to say clearly that for God there is no division between the living and the dead - **He is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.** If this new life we anticipate is going to be better than this one it also has to be different. Again, people get distracted by discussions on what we cannot know: how old will we be in heaven; will we recognise each other; am I still expected to join the choir even if I can't sing?

Often at funerals I draw the analogy between the life we all had before we were born. It was all we knew. It was all consuming and the womb was our world. Once we are born that world is irrelevant to us. We live in the world we know now. We don't look back with longing to those days. So it will be when we die. It will be like being born into a new world, where the world we knew will become irrelevant, all the more so because God will be our focus.