

St. Columba's Episcopal Church
November 9, 2025 – 22 Pentecost
Job 19:23-27a
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

This morning, I would like to depart from my usual pattern of preaching about the Gospel lesson for the day. Instead, I will talk about the Book of Common Prayer, scripture, and faith.

The Book of Common Prayer is steeped in scripture. Sometimes the Prayer Book gives us scriptural references. Here are a few examples. From the service of Morning Prayer, the Jubilate, “Be joyful in the Lord, all you lands” is Psalm 100. The Canticum we sang this morning, also in the service of Morning Prayer, is from The Song of the Three Young Men in the Old Testament Apocrypha. In the Penitential Order used at the beginning of Lent, we repeat the words of Jesus when he quotes the Two Great Commandments – to love God, our neighbors, and ourselves – from Deuteronomy and Leviticus in the Old Testament. Our service of Holy Eucharist begins with an Offertory Sentence – “Walk in love as Christ loved us” – from The Letter to the Ephesians in the New Testament. Most familiar of all are the words in every service of Holy Eucharist, referred to as the Words of Institution: “On the night before he died for us, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread” and so on. These important words come from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke as well as St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians.

Often Prayer Book services contain bits and pieces of scripture passages without specific references. If you know the Bible well, you may recognize them. Or if you know the Prayer Book well and then read or hear the Bible, you may be surprised to learn where the Prayer Book words originated.

This brings me to our reading from Job, a long and complex book in the Old Testament. In the brief passage we heard, Job expresses his wish that his complaint about all the undeserved suffering he is enduring will be recorded, and he asserts his belief that eventually someone, his vindicator, will stand up for him and present his case for justice before God.

Back to the Prayer Book and the Opening Sentences of the Burial service. “As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives and that at the last he will stand upon the earth. After my awaking, he will raise me up; and in my body I shall see God. I myself shall see, and my eyes behold him who is my friend and not a stranger.” We hear the echoes of the book of Job, but the words have taken on a new and different meaning. As Christians, we identify the Redeemer as Jesus Christ. We hear the Old Testament with Christian ears.

This happens with other passages. Perhaps the most familiar are passages from the Old Testament book of Isaiah, quoted in George Frideric Handel’s oratorio, the “Messiah.” “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,” “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd,” “I know that my Redeemer liveth,” “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” “Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows,” (King James Version). Can you hear these words and not think of Jesus? I can’t. But all these words were written long before the birth of Jesus and when they were written, they would not have been read as referring to Jesus.

I have read the Opening Sentences of the Burial service many times. And every time I read these words – “I myself shall see, and my eyes behold him who is my friend and not a stranger” – every time my heart is touched. These words sum up all that I hope for. I want to see Jesus who is my friend. That is why I chose the hymn before the Gospel, “What a friend we

have in Jesus.” I wonder, how might I be a friend of Jesus? That question alone could guide my life of faith. What would a friend of Jesus be like? What would a friend of Jesus do?

So, I ask you, what words of the Bible or Prayer Book or other writing touch your heart every time you hear or pray them? What do you want most as a follower of Jesus? Is there a relationship with Jesus that speaks to you most clearly? Perhaps it is Jesus your brother or Jesus your teacher. Perhaps your companion as you journey through life, a companion you can count on. Or our savior Jesus on the cross. Or the risen Jesus speaking your name as he spoke to Mary near his empty tomb, calling her name with a voice she knew to be his. How does God move you and lead you to faith and worship and service?

I recommend to you a fascinating documentary on PBS, “Earth’s Sacred Wonders: House of the Divine.” In this program you will see people of many faiths who do extraordinary deeds to honor and serve the God or gods in whom they believe. A huge number of Hindu men and women in India who prepared 1,400 beautiful and bountiful platters of food to offer the gods at the New Year. Thousands of Muslim women and men who fast from sunrise to sunset in hot climates, not even taking a sip of water, in the month of Ramadan when the Quran is believed to have been revealed to Muhammed. In Spain, more than two hundred Christian men who carry through the streets on their shoulders a shrine to the Virgin Mary weighing thousands of pounds for six hours on Holy Thursday. A Buddhist man who trained in King Fu for years and memorized a 200-page book of mantras to pass the tests to become a Warrior Monk. Amazing acts of faith. Seeing the devotion of these people is inspiring.

How will we express our devotion to God, to our Savior, Jesus Christ? How do we envision what God desires? One way to look at what God desires is in terms of stewardship – an attitude to life, a guide to using the gifts that God has given us. A steward is a person who manages another’s property, not their own. A steward uses what belongs to another. A steward’s responsibility is to manage the property according to the wishes of the owner. We believe that the property we are called to manage belongs to God. We believe that God wants us to use God’s property, God’s gifts, for the benefit of all, according to God’s ways of mercy, justice, and compassion. Each of us must find our own ways of being good stewards.

Would you please stand and join with me as we commit ourselves to God in the words of A Stewardship Litany found in your service leaflets on page 9:

God of life and love: We are quick to accept bounteous gifts from you, but slow to give thanks and to express our gratitude.

We hold too tightly the things of this life, giving them the allegiance we owe only to you.

Gracious God, we admit that our lives are too often out of balance; we are more willing to receive than to share, more ready to take than to give.

Create in us grateful and generous hearts, we pray, and restore to us the joy of our salvation.

Merciful God, from whom comes every good and perfect gift, we praise you for your mercies;

Your goodness that has created us, your grace that has sustained us,

Your discipline that has corrected us, your patience that has borne with us,

And your love that has redeemed us.

Help us to love you, and to be thankful for all your gifts by serving you and delighting to do your will.

Gracious God, accept our offerings, our pledges of resources and talents for your service, and the commitment of our lives, through Jesus Christ, who gave his all for us. Amen.