Proper 27 Yr C, November 9, 2019

If you happen to go downtown to ‘‘Iolani Palace this weekend and on Monday you will see the palace adorned with the red white and blue bunting of Hawai‘i; miniature Hawaiian flags adorn the balcony a gigantic Hawaiian flag and another flag that represents the personal standard of Queen Lili’uokalani hang from the second story. The reason for this elaborate display is the commemoration of the death of Queen Lili’uokalani- Hawai’i’s only queen regent and last reigning monarch. She died November 11, 1917 in her home at Washington Place just adjacent to St. Andrews Cathedral, at age 79 from complications from a stroke. She was given a state funeral and her casket was processed up Nu’uanu Avenue pulled by 204 stevedores for her entombment and burial at Mauna ‘Ala or the Royal Mausoleum.

A year later to the day the Armstice would be signed bringing an end to what the Western world hoped would be the “war to end all wars”. Estimates that there were 40 million military and civilian casualties in WW1 with 15-19 million deaths of those 9-11 million were military. \Known also as Remembrance Day, in the United States, Veterans Day honors those that serve and have served in our armed forces and the sacrifices they have made in service to their nation.

In reflecting on the convergence of Veterans Day and the 102th anniversary of Lili‘uokalani’s passing and our scriptures for today all have in them an element of death.

And that could be the rather morbid end of it. But God does not do that. Instead, as much as our scriptures are about our final consummation, they are also about hope and promise. Scripture teaches us that God is a god of the living.

By way of the backstory, Job has had everything taken away from him, his family is killed off, his crops are destroyed, everything is gone as part of a bet between God and Satan over whether or not Job will abandon God altogether. Job was a righteous man and what’s happened to him seems so unfair. Ultimately, Job wants justice he wants to face the almighty and ask himself, “Why did this happen?” Has he done something wrong? His so called friends insist he must have in order to merit God’s lack of favor and turn of fortune.

In the text for this Sunday, Job imagines two a couple of ways he eventually might be vindicated. He accepts the likelihood that he will die unanswered by God. And if he dies, so too dies his case. His presumed guilt will be the final word. Therefore, he fervently wishes that his case against God be inscribed in a book. Better yet, his words could be engraved with an iron pen on a rock and the letters lined with lead to protect them from wear, an enduring, monumental testimony to his innocence. After his death, Job expects that a kinsman redeemer will arise and stand “upon the Earth” to defend him. This contrasts with his earlier hope for a witness in heaven (16:18-19). Job has suffered on earth, and his vindication must be earthly as well.

In the case of 2 Thessalonians 2, rumors have spread through the church concerning Paul’s teaching about the end times and these rumors are causing significant distress. Rather than becoming distracted by detailed maps of the end times and time frames Paul’s message is one of encouragement that they “not become easily unsettled or alarmed, either by spirit or by world or by letter” but instead “stand firm and hold fast to the teachings” he gave them in person. They are to ground themselves in Christ’s grace and hope do not let the anxiety of the end times over come them.

In our gospel lesson, Jesus encounters the Sadducees. Though they are rivals of the Pharisees, they are united in their dislike of Jesus. The Sadducees had primary authority over the Temple. They recognized only the Pentateuch or the original five "books of Moses" as fully authoritative, and for this reason did not believe in the resurrection of the dead (because it is not referenced in the Pentateuch). In his criticism of the religious leaders, Jesus would attack the sacrificial practices of the Temple, thus incurring the wrath of the sadducees. In asking Jesus about this widow who has absolutely no luck in the husband department, they reference a law called levirate marriage from the Latin levir ("brother in law") comes from Deuteronomy 25:5-10. This law sought to insure the preservation of one's family name by stipulating that a man should marry the childless widow of his brother. The question is hypothetical, meant to take an ancient practice to the extreme in order to show that the whole idea of resurrection was foolish.

Of course, Jesus doesn’t fall for the trap. First, he demonstrates their failure to understand the resurrection. Second, he demonstrates their failure to understand Scriptures by using another passage from the Pentateuch -- the crucial Exodus 3 story of Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush and the revelation of God's holy name. In doing so, Jesus establishes the validity, indeed certainty, of life after death.

What all of our scriptures point to and particularly the gospel is that the resurrected life, is very different from the life of here and now. Which invites the question- What is the resurrected life like? Or more to the point, “how much will our resurrection life be like our life in this world? And what will our relationships be?

As human beings we want to believe that our existence in the next life will be a lot like our existence in this one where we will retain our persona- our memories- our relationships. But we should limit our imagination when it comes to God’s design. When we talk of “eternal life” we talk of being in the nearer presence of God. Remember that Jesus all along has been calling us to be citizens of the Kingdom of God where the rules are vastly different from that of this one. Time and space canot understood in the same way as we understand them now. And as far as our relationships go, we cannot know what they will be like, but we know that we will be related to each other in and through our relationship with God.

In the resurrection- what exactly is resurrected? The soul? The body? I once asked the question when I was young what happens to those who are cremated? Job after all says, “After my skin has been torn apart this way— then from my flesh I’ll see God, whom I’ll see myself— my eyes see, and not a stranger’s.” Is there an implication that all the ash pieces will come back to form a whole person again? Or is it the soul that is resurrected? Once again, the vision of resurrection lies in the imagination of God himself. But what we can sense is that resurrection insists that the whole person will ins some way be united with God. And it is our whole selves not some whispy essence that God promises to redeem. All of us go down to the dust- in other words we all die and there is no escaping it, but because of the One who died on the cross and was raised again- who as our creed says decended to the dead and has come back. We now live and die with the promise that God will also rasie us from death to new life where, in the words of Jesus today we hear that we cannot die, because we are lie angels and are chidlren of God, being children of resurrection.

God is a a god of the living. That is God does not exist for us when we die, but as followers of Jesus we ought to be about things that bring life.

As children of the cross we believe that resurrection is possible. How can our lives lived on this earth be lives that bring life and hope- lives that seek to destroy death and despair?

When the Queen was deposed she willingly abdicated ceeding her authority to that of the pro-American businessmen who sought power for their own gain. There were Hawaiian’s - Native and citizens of the Kingdom, willing to fight and to die to protect their queen and their homeland. But she said no, she wanted to avoid further bloodshed. She believed ultimately in God and in justice. While under house arrest she composed hymns including one called the Queen’s Prayer which we will sing beginning next week. And though no longer queen of the Hawaiian kingdom, remained Queen of Hawaii until her death in 1917. Lili’uokanlai’s life and her actions were about caring for the people of Hawai’i in a way that brought hope and life.

Like Queen Lili’uokalani before us, as followers of Jesus, as children of the living God and the god of the living, what ways can we bring light and life to this world even as we wait for the next? We will offer this world the Aloha it so desperately needs- an Aloha that is missing from our public square. A love so profound and deep that it can overcome any darkness- because it leads to resurrection and eternal life.