

*Job 19:23 "Oh, that my words were recorded,  
that they were written on a scroll,  
24that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead,  
or engraved in rock forever!  
25I know that my Redeemer lives,  
and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.  
26And after my skin has been destroyed,  
yet in my flesh I will see God;  
27I myself will see him  
with my own eyes—I, and not another.  
How my heart yearns within me!*

Dear Friends in Christ,

*"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of [our hearts] be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer" (Ps 19:14).*

Dear Family of Sheryl, Ben, Mrs. Bender, Bruce, Drew, Shane, Sara, and dear friends. We have said good-bye to Sheryl but we will bear her imprint on our lives.

Sheryl did something few members of our church have done. Now this really isn't a difficult a thing to do. In fact, I would say that every single adult member could do this. The thing she did, which few have done, is she chose the hymns and the Bible readings for her funeral. Most people don't do that. "Leave it to the pastor," I imagine a lot of people think. And I'm ok with that. Yes, I'm just fine with that.

But it is a good thing Sheryl did this. Because before I got to church to check in the file, I was thinking of words from the Bible that would be appropriate for this moment today. A couple Bible passages came to mind. I thought of Acts chapter 14 where the Apostle Paul was visiting some dearly beloved Christians. Paul visited them and in *"encouraging them to remain true to the faith. [He said,] 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God'"* (22). "Yes," I thought, "who would have understood *"going through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God"* better than Sheryl? She has probably gotten on of first name basis with more doctors, nurses and staff than all the rest of us put together! Or I thought of another place where the Bible compares each Christian to a clay pot containing a treasure. Yes, that was Sheryl, a fragile clay pot always in danger of being crushed, yet containing the secret to eternal life, faith in Jesus. Yes, Sheryl would have liked that picture of a clay pot holding a treasure.

And so I was a little bit surprised when I opened Sheryl's file and saw her choices for her funeral. Because while those things are good and true, that is not the sort of thing she wanted read at this service. She didn't want to talk about *her* fragile life. Job 19:23-27 are the words she chose for us to think about.

These words were spoken by a man named Job. Job suffered a lot – more than probably any of us. Job suffered loss of health, like our dear sister. Job also suffered loss of children. Job also suffered from friends who had little to no sympathy for him. Even though this man with a strange name suffered so much, he did not want to talk about his suffering. Does that sound like anyone you have known? Someone whose body ached and who said, “Let’s not talk about my pain, my health or lack thereof, let’s talk about something more important.”

It is said that about 500 years ago there was a man named Martin Luther who got into an argument on a point of faith. The point itself isn’t important for our considerations here. Luther felt very strongly about a certain Bible truth. Others disagreed. They kept trying to explain why Martin Luther’s point didn’t make any sense to the human mind. He kept going back to one Bible passage. In a hundred different ways they tried to show that he was being unreasonable. He said, “While all your arguments make sense this mind, they don’t agree with these words of God.”

Ever been there with people like that, people who appeal to reason, even when it is clearly at odds with God’s will? And they are clever. They can turn your head around with their arguments. They say, “It doesn’t pay to tell the truth. No one else tells the truth. Telling the truth is going to hurt you.” And you keep coming back to, “But God wants me to tell the truth.” And they have a thousand reasons you shouldn’t. You only have one. Ever been there?

So there is Martin Luther with his opponents and their bundle of human arguments against his single passage from the Bible. You know what he did? Luther wrote the Bible passage on the table in front of them. And whenever they tried to convince him, he pointed to those words.

That was Job with his friends. His friends kept telling him things like, “The reason you are suffering, bereft of children and impoverished is that God is punishing you. Or maybe God doesn’t care. Or maybe God is unjust. Maybe you need to act better.”

And so Job says, ***“Oh, that my words... were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved on rock forever.”*** Job carves the words on the table, he says to his friends, “Stop trying to fool me with your conventional wisdom, with your popular psychobabble. Your wisdom is worthless. Remember this! Carve it with iron. Carve it into stone. Let this be my witness forever... ***“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see him.”***

Sheryl chose these words today because for these moments she wants you to leave all your human ideas and arguments aside. In this service she didn’t want you to think about her troubles—or her virtues. She wanted you to think about how to get where she has already gone. And it isn’t by being a good person or by helping others or any of that. Those are good and noble things. But she wanted this inscribed in stone, ***“I know that my Redeemer lives.”*** That was her choice for this service.

What’s a redeemer? A redeemer is someone who buys people out of debt or imprisonment. There was no chapter 9 bankruptcy in ancient days. If you got in debt, you

could get sold as a servant or slave. Or captured in war, a POW? No repatriation at the end of hostilities, at least not for free. But you could go home if you had a Redeemer, someone to buy you back out of captivity. Job looked to his spiritual Redeemer.

When Sheryl picked words for her funeral, she was telling me, “Pastor, don’t talk about me. Don’t talk about *my* pain and suffering. Don’t talk about any virtues or problems *I* had. Talk about my Redeemer.” You see, she wants to see you in heaven. And she knew and believed and clung to the words she chose for another reading I read minutes ago: Jesus said, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6). Jesus is the Redeemer. He has bought us from all the sins we commit. It isn’t that we can make up for our sometimes bad behavior with our sometimes good behavior. No, we need a Redeemer. We need someone to pay the price, to buy us back from the sins we have committed. That Redeemer is our Savior Jesus who died on a cross. Simply trust, believe and accept that your Redeemer has paid the price you cannot pay.

Sheryl is enjoying heaven right now. And it is better than she expected. And she wants to see you there. She wasn’t the sort of person who needed to get the last word in an argument. She was too gracious. But this one time, she does want to have the last word. And today, we will let her have the last word. This was it... [read Job 19:23-27]

Amen.