

Text: Luke:21:28 “. . .stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

### YOUR REDEMPTION IS DRAWING NEAR

When I was a child S and H Green Stamps were very popular. You received stamps for every dollar you spent at participating retailers. You carefully glued the stamps into savings books and when you had enough books for a product that you wanted you went to an S and H Redemption Center. Many of us as adult Christians still have an S and H Green Stamp theology. If we do good works, think pure thoughts, pray for forgiveness – we will fill our savings books with stamps. While we are alive, we can trade those books in for good health, prosperity and other worldly wishes and on our death, we can trade them in for eternal life. Sorry, that is really bad theology. Episcopalians believe that humans can never earn redemption, that it is a free gift out of God’s love for humankind. With that in mind, let us spend a few moments looking at redemption beyond the Green stamp mentality.

**Redeemed from:** A good starting point is to ask what are we redeemed from? The easy and most important answer is that we are delivered or rescued from sin. I cannot really give you a good definition of sin, but, like a justice of the U. S. Supreme Court when asked to define pornography, I recognize it when I see it. Of course, it is the sins of others that I see most clearly! I can clearly see the speck of sin in your eye as I peer at you around the log in my own eye. I am often reminded of that annoying line in the Lord’s prayer, “forgive me my trespasses as I forgive the trespasses of others.” Ouch, God is making it difficult for me to self-righteously judge others. Jesus seems to be telling us that although redemption is freely given by God’s grace, our actions do have an impact on the redemptive process; to get forgiveness, we must give forgiveness!

As we are redeemed from sin, so we are rescued from other disabilities. One of those, that comes first to mind, is anxiety. If we genuinely believe that we are redeemed, then our anxieties should really disappear. Our concern about our health, our relationships and our prosperity should vanish. All around us may change, even as we are changing, but our redeemed faith remains a constant, giving us the security that we need to face uncertainty without debilitating anxiety.

In today's world of immense complexity one cause of much anxiety is the feelings of inferiority that plagues many people much of the time and all of us sometime. If you never have a feeling of inferiority, you simply have not challenged yourself sufficiently! A redeemed person is inferior to no one. You may be ignorant in many areas of learning, as we all are, but as a human being you are only a little lower than God. You may not be competent in all things, there are no Renaissance people left, but you are competent to live a meaningful life.

**Redeemed for:** So, we are redeemed from sin, anxiety, and feelings of inferiority. That leaves open the question that we do not often address: For what are we redeemed? Scripture, tradition, and reason are all united in holding that we are redeemed primarily for **loving**. We are to love God, our neighbors and ourselves. If you do not love yourself, you certainly cannot love anyone else. That does not mean that you must be a narcissist, far from it. It does mean that you need to recognize your intrinsic worth and that you are a worthy member of God’s human family. At that point you will have the ability to love God and your neighbor. Whether we are speaking of good interpersonal relationships

or international peace we must ultimately act from a basis of love. That is not a naive view of the world, but a profoundly sophisticated view of human possibilities.

With love as the basis, we recognize that we are also redeemed for thinking. Christians are often described as a people of the Word. Certainly, we must have belief, but it should be an informed belief. That kind of belief will allow us to accept science and its' findings, technology and its' instruments, change and its' challenges. We will be able to embrace our existence with joy and enthusiasm because we understand that love and knowledge may, with God's help, co-exist. Imagine what the earth might be like if we brought thinking, informed by love, to work on the problems of the human race. Climate change, wealth distribution, equality of opportunity, peace among people and institutions – all addressed with redeemed thinking would work God's will on earth.

Just as we are redeemed for loving and thinking, so we are charged by our Godly redemption to engage in serving. In the home, in Church, in the community we need to express the reality of our redemption by serving others. Paul reminds us that, whatever our gifts, they are all needed in the here and now. We are the redeemed, the ones who must build the Kingdom of God. If not us who?

The S and H Green stamp redemption centers are closed. Fortunately, God's redemption center is still open. God reminds us, all through Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, that we are redeemed from sin, anxiety, and feelings of inferiority in order to engage in godly loving, thinking, and serving. With that in mind, let us "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with. . .the worries of this life." Rejoice for your redemption is drawing near. Amen.