

The Scandal of the Resurrection

Luke 20:27-38

All Saints' Sunday, November 7, 2021 – Aledo UMC

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Sermon Text, Luke 20:27-38

²⁷ Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. ²⁸ “Teacher,” they said, “Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. ³⁰ The second ³¹ and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. ³² Finally, the woman died too.

³³ Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”

³⁴ Jesus replied, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. ³⁵ But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, ³⁶ and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection. ³⁷ But in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’^[b] ³⁸ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.”

³⁹ Some of the teachers of the law responded, “Well said, teacher!” ⁴⁰ And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Sermon, “The Scandal of the Resurrection”

Every so often someone will ask me a question about creationism or end times events or homosexuality or gun control or politics or any number of other issues. And I know that the purpose behind the question is not to get an answer; the purpose is to see if I have the right beliefs in the mind of the person who is posing the question. And I know that as I answer, I am being weighed in the balance. Am I too liberal? Am I too conservative?

That’s not a new phenomenon. Times really haven’t changed all that much. All you have to do is look to today’s Gospel lesson and you’ll discover that Jesus was often asked questions and weighed in the balance.

Such is the case in Luke chapter 20. In verse 1, some chief priests and teachers of the law ask Jesus by what authority he was doing what he was doing. Then in verse 20, the Pharisees ask Jesus about paying taxes to Caesar.

Finally, in verse 27, some Sadducees present him with the rather convoluted and preposterous question about life after death and marriage.

We tend to lump the Pharisees and Sadducees together as though they were interchangeable; however, that wasn’t the case at all.

The Sadducees were the staunch conservatives of their day. That is because their rule of faith was the Pentateuch and nothing but the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch is comprised of the first five books of the Bible, all of which are credited to Moses. The Sadducees rejected everything from the Book of Joshua through the Book of Malachi.

In examining the Pentateuch, the Sadducees could not find a doctrine of the resurrection, so they rejected the idea of life after death. That's why they were **sad, you see**.

On the other hand, the Pharisees were liberals; they accepted all of what we now know as the Old Testament—the Law, the books of history, the prophets and the wisdom literature. Because they drew from a wider range of writings as well as the oral tradition of the ancient Jews, they held to a belief in the resurrection.

Today that means that if you believe in the resurrection of the dead, then you are a liberal.

The Sadducees concocted a preposterous story that was rooted in the levirate marriage system of their day. The levirate marriage system was designed to protect widows and, if necessary, give them an opportunity to bear a child.

However, in the scenario presented by the Sadducees one could only wonder why anyone would need to protect the widow; it was the husband who needed protection because clearly anyone who married that “black widow” was surely going to die!

As far as the Sadducees were concerned, any notion of life after death was scandalous, so they concocted this hypothetical story, not because they were interested in the answer, but because they wanted to make a fool of Jesus. The Sadducees were urban aristocrats; they looked down their nose at Jesus, whom they considered to be a know-nothing wanna-be prophet from Galilee.

Knowing that the Sadducees only accepted the books of Moses, Jesus quoted from Exodus 3:6 which says that “Moses showed that the dead rise for he calls the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’”

Then Jesus adds, “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.”

Jesus refuses to have some self-appointed know-it-all aristocrats undermine what was at the very heart of his mission. Jesus did not come to earth to be a good teacher. He did not come to earth to heal a handful of hurting people. Yes, he did those things, but his primary mission was to open heaven to humanity. His number one priority was to free us from sin so that if we would believe in him, we would have eternal life.

I seem to remember someone saying somewhere that “whosoever believeth on him shall not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16b).

Let's look at that word “perish” for a moment. We “liberals” who believe in the resurrection tend to interpret that word to mean that we will not go to hell when we die. But there's more to it than that. The Sadducees were well-educated in the Law, and they used that education to teach others that there was no life after death. They taught that when you die, that's it. You're buried. You decompose. You *perish*. You have no hope beyond the grave.

Don't we have more than our fair share of well-educated know-it-all elitists today who tell us that the grave is the end; there is no life after death; there is no hope? But the Bible tells us that whoever believes in Jesus shall not rot in the ground, but will be resurrected and inherit everlasting life.

Jesus refused to be undermined by the Sadducees; but there's more: he also refused to have anyone rob his followers of their hope of eternal life.

Hope is a powerful thing.

One urban school system had a program to help children keep up with their schoolwork during hospital stays. One day a teacher who was assigned to the program received a routine call asking her to visit a particular child. She jotted down the child's name and hospital room number and talked briefly with the child's regular class teacher.

"We're studying nouns and adverbs in his class now," the regular teacher said, "and I'd be grateful if you could help him understand them, so he doesn't fall too far behind."

The hospital program teacher went to see the boy that afternoon. No one had told her that the boy had been severely burned and was in great pain. When she met the boy, she became so upset at his suffering that she stammered, "I've been sent by your school to help you with nouns and adverbs."

When she left, she felt she hadn't accomplished anything. But the next day a nurse called her and asked, "What did you do with that boy?"

The teacher felt she must have done something wrong and began to apologize. "No, no," said the nurse. "You don't know what I mean. We've been worried about that little boy, but ever since yesterday, his whole attitude has changed. He's fighting back, responding to treatment. It's as though he's decided to live."

Two weeks later the boy explained that he had completely given up hope until the teacher arrived. Everything changed when he came to a simple realization. He expressed it by saying: "They wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they?"

We have a hope that goes beyond our knowledge of nouns and adverbs. We have the hope of eternal life in Christ. Don't let any modern-day know-it-all Sadducees rob you of your hope. They're just **sad, you see**.

Jesus makes it clear that the Sadducees were so stuck in the thinking of this world that they could not comprehend life beyond this world; they were so preoccupied with the details of the levirate marriage system that they were unable to contemplate something radically new, the miracle of the resurrection.¹

Jesus calls attention to the difference between life in this present world and life in the next world, after the resurrection. In this world, people die regularly and the future of the human race is sustained by sexuality.

However, in the next world, the world of the resurrection, there will be no more dying. Because there will be no more death, there will be no further need to sustain the human race through procreation. Put more bluntly, God has established marriage on earth as our antidote for death.

But what about the relationship of a husband and wife once they go to heaven? I envision those couples reconnecting in glory, embracing one another and saying, "Honey, as long as we made our home on earth, you were my cure for death. We stood together and we held the grave at bay. Now through Jesus Christ, we conquered death once and for all and we've made

¹ From *Texts for Preaching, A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year C*. Charles Cousar, et al. WJK 1994, pg. 594.

it into eternal life. And because we stuck together on earth and kept our faith in Christ, we made a family who one day can enjoy this sweet eternity with us.”

Jesus said the day is coming when we will all be “children of the resurrection.” That simply means that we will be immortal, just like the angels of God.

Jesus wants us to understand that as children of the resurrection, our eternal future is not simply an extension of our present existence. It is not the case that we can take what we like out of our current life, raise it to the nth power and call it heaven. Rather, resurrection entails transformation.²

Until that day, Jesus wants us to know is that God is the great “I AM.” God is alive and for God all of those who have gone before are yet alive. God himself—the Living God—is all the proof of the resurrection that we need.

² Ibid.