

Luke 20:27-38

We are nearing the end of the church year; thus Jesus is drawing closer to the cross. His encounter with the Sadducees in the gospel reading from Luke reminds us of the reason the religious people were set against him. His thoughts and beliefs are so very different from what they know to be true. They are inflexible, do not want their positions to be challenged, so they challenge Jesus with what they believe will truly stump him, prove him wrong, and discredit him. But Jesus has a broader outlook of God's kingdom that is beyond their, and perhaps our, understanding.

Sadducees didn't believe in heaven, didn't believe in life after death. You may know how one of my professors taught us to differentiate between Sadducees and Pharisees, Sadducees don't believe in resurrection, that is why they are so sad you see. Luke tells us in the reading that a few of the Sadducees join in discussion with Jesus and the crowd surrounding him by challenging him with a story that they think will prove their point of view about no resurrection, leaning heavily on their Levite law.

The Levite law instructs that when a woman's husband dies without a male heir her husband's brother is required by law to marry her to produce an heir for her husband. The unfortunate woman whom they relate in their story is subjected to seven brothers who all die, childless before the woman, who is finally released by her own death. This, according to Rev. Debbie Thomas, is actually supposed to be a joke the Sadducees told to prove how ridiculous it is to believe in the resurrection (Thomas, Debbie Journey with Jesus.com. Nov. 13, 2019 captured 11/8/2025). With their restricted belief system they were unable to see any way a woman could be married to seven husbands in the afterlife.

Jesus surprises them, and most likely confuses them, with his response that marriage is nonexistent in heaven, that human desire is a thing of the past, and humans will be like the angels. Jesus does not say that the resurrected one will become an angel, they don't. He is saying that like the angels they will be children of the resurrection, children of God. The Sadducees didn't know how to respond to this, they were most likely embarrassed by Jesus' response or shook it off as unreasonable. Either way this exchange of words gave the religious leaders more ammunition to use against Jesus. They believed his ideas to be ludicrous, and the people were following him. They had to put a stop to him. All because they could not think out of the box.

Is there a rational box that keeps you from seeing further, from taking a chance? I recently read a story about Eleanor, a 73 year old woman whose husband had died two years prior. Her son was hinting she should go into a retirement village by leaving flyers lay on the kitchen counter. True, she was completely bored with doing nothing, with taking it easy, with being safe, but she wasn't ready for a retirement home.

One day she walked past a real live book store that had an inventory liquidation sign on the front door. She walked in and without thinking about what she was doing she struck up a conversation with the owner and discovered the young man inherited the store from his father but he couldn't make a living from it, let alone even pay the property taxes. Eleanor had been an accountant for years, she still balanced her son's books.

Eleanor made Alex a ridiculous offer. She told him she would have money from selling her house, it wouldn't be enough to save the store, but enough to keep the store open. She offered to become his partner, balancing the books, working the register,

cleaning, painting, and live rent-free in the upstairs apartment. They'd have a six month trial. He thought she was crazy. The roof leaked, the apartment was used for storage and hadn't been lived in or even cleaned for years. She convinced him to accept her offer. Her son threatened to have her declared incompetent for her crazy idea. She ignored him.

Eleanor worked hard getting the apartment livable. She spent twelve hours a day organizing forty years of inventory and built a real accounting system. Alex was amazing in his knowledge of the books on the shelves, so the two of them made a great team. Eleanor brewed coffee and opened the doors at 9 a.m. every morning. Customers started to return. Sometimes just to drink coffee and sit around the table to chat. Sometimes to browse the shelves... Eleanor observed people with obviously different life styles and beliefs standing in the same row of books without pointing fingers or arguing. She instituted silent reading nights where the store was open to come sit among the shelves and read. 20 people came to the first one.

Then social media opened the store to thousands of people. Alex filmed Eleanor talking about a copy of *The Grapes of Wrath*. She said that people thought it was a sad book. It isn't, she said, it is an angry book about angry people who had everything taken from them but they refused to stop being people, they refused to be disposable. The video went viral and the store began to thrive. They are even holding events like resume writing workshops for the guys who were laid off from the town's auto-parts plant. The amazing part of this is that her son realized she was not a crazy old woman but a vital part of humanity who is sharing what she knows. He suggested his legal firm was looking for a place to do pro-bono work for something related to literacy if she ever needed legal advice. He saw her as a person.

Eleanor was willing to look beyond the confining walls of her home and find a way to think out of the box, changing life not only for Alex and herself, but for thousands of people who listened to their blog, "The Main Street Reader" with 150,000 followers. Sure, it could have backfired. Sure she and Alex could have been out on the street. But they survived, both of them happy. Something that never could have happened had Eleanor not taken a chance.

What is it that God is calling you to look at differently? What is it at the church that God may be calling us to reevaluate? What is holding us back from moving forward with new ideas? Why can we not step out and take a chance, trusting that God has our best interests and will take care of us when we follow God's desires?

Jesus ended his discussion by telling the Sadducees that God is a God of the living. To quote Rev. Debbie Thomas, "We serve the God of the living. What does this mean? Perhaps it means that God is always in the business of making new, and making alive, and making vibrant. Perhaps it means we need to stop clinging to what is dead, to what is deadening, to what is passing away. Perhaps it means we need to risk evolution, metanoia, growth, and change. What new and living thing does God want to do among us that we're too afraid to let God do? Where are we stagnating? Can we rise up out of our graves? Can we hold out for the impossible? Can we dare to live as Jesus longs for us to live? As the children of resurrection?" (Thomas, D. *Journey with Jesus*.com. Nov. 13, 2019 captured 11/8/2025).

All glory be to God.