

Luke 20: 27-38 God of the Living

Friends, we have arrived in Jerusalem. To update those of you joining in worship this morning for the first time, or after a break, for the last several months, we've been following Jesus and his disciples in the Gospel according to Luke, on their journey from Galilee, where Jesus first called his disciples, to Jerusalem. Along the way, we've seen Jesus heal people, cast out demons, teach his disciples and engage the Pharisees who challenged Jesus, often through stories and parables. And, although the disciples did not fully understand, Jesus told them what awaited him in Jerusalem: rejection by his own people, and the salvation of the world God would accomplish through his death and resurrection.

All Saints Day, All Souls Day, Dia de Muertos, the Halloween; these days occasion us to ponder on life and death, and what hope we who trust in Jesus Christ may have. The mystery of the resurrection life is what we are listening for today. Let us pray. God of our salvation, we're gathered before you here, on this side of death, eager to hear your word of Life and find hope. Open our hearts to the mystery of your eternal realm to which you beckon us all. May the words of my mouth and the mediation of all our hearts be acceptable to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

So, finally in Jerusalem, before he fulfills his mission, Jesus encounters his last opponents, the Sadducees. Who are they? We've got pretty well acquainted with the Pharisees and the scribes, who were legal experts who cared a lot about keeping the Law of Moses in every aspect of life, and they challenged Jesus because, to them, Jesus's actions appeared to ignore the law. But who were the Sadducees, and how come we haven't met them before? And why are they asking this strange question?

We haven't heard of them in Luke's Gospel before, because the Sadducees were the priestly class, whose activities were mainly in the Temple in Jerusalem, and they belonged to the elite upper class. But the biggest thing about them was that they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Why? To them, the Holy Scripture was only the Five Books of Moses, the Torah; they didn't consider other writings in the Hebrew Scriptures such as Psalms and the Prophets and the oral traditions to be their Bible, as the Pharisees and Jesus did. And since they thought there was nothing in their Bible about the resurrection of the dead, they didn't believe in it. And of course, they are the ones Jesus engages in, before his own death and resurrection.

So, we have here a group of Sadducees asking Jesus a "question" about the resurrection, but of course it's not a genuine question, for their minds are already made up that there is no such thing as the resurrection of the dead. They are just challenging Jesus, or so they think. Their Bible, the Book of Moses, contained what's known as the levirate law of marriage, which sets the responsibility of a man toward his dead brother. He was to marry his brother's widow to make sure his family name survived, and the property "stayed in the family." At the same time, the levirate marriage provided the male support and protection to the widow. The Sadducees showed how this law would create a dilemma if all those dead husbands were to be resurrected. Whose wife would she be? They thought they cleverly proved how ridiculous a notion the resurrection from the dead was; to them, life ended with death, period.

Jesus answers their trick question in two parts. First, he points out what they got wrong about the resurrection life, that they thought of it as a mere continuation of this life, as in "more of the same" and the same rules applied. Jesus says, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead

neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed, they cannot die any more, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.”

What? No more marriage? We are all going to be just children of God. This doesn't sound very comforting nor hopeful to those of us who have lost the love of our lives to death, or to those who lost parents as a child, and.... all of us who long to be reunited with our loved ones on the other side of death. Are we going to be all “children of God” stripped of the special ties that shaped our relationships and our identities? Well, that is not what Jesus is saying here.

Jesus is responding to the scenario presented by the Sadducees that assumed the law that kept the social structure in this age to be carried over into that age. The levirate law, as other laws, imposed the rigid hierarchy in the society as well as protection to the vulnerable who were bound to live under the hierarchy of human construct. In the resurrection life, there will be no need for such protection, for all are children of God, living free of imperfect and unjust social systems. The Sadducees' question is a moot point. They wrongly assumed that the law that was given by God for the people of this age, on this side of death, would carry over to the life on the other side of death.

Then, knowing that the Sadducees respected only the Book of Moses as their Bible, Jesus pulls a story from there, Exodus 3:6 to be exact, where God spoke to Moses as God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. It actually starts with God saying “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Now, by the time Moses is hearing this, these fathers are long dead, and yet in God they are alive and as Moses's fathers. In God, those who had concluded their lives here on earth are very much alive. God was, is and always will be God of the Living, both on this side of death, in our earthly lives of joys and sorrows, and on the other side of death, in the resurrection mystery of Life Eternal, promised to all.

To all? But Jesus, speaking to the Sadducee, said “but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead.” those who are considered worthy... who are considered worthy? All the saints? What about us? What about those who struggled in their relationship with God?

I was a student once at a certain Christian high school, not Menaul School, and my Christian classmates told me it was my responsibility to bring my non-Christian father to the Lord. Then I met and came to care deeply for a man who had a very difficult relationship with God, because growing up, he was told that God could not love or accept him as he was. What about them?

I sure hope they felt God’s love through me, but I could not bear the burden that it was my responsibility to save them; such burden didn’t sit well with me, because it wasn’t mine to bear. God could use me to reflect God’s love back to the world, but my comfort and hope is not in how well I can do that but rather in the words of Jesus who said, as we heard him say just last week, “I came to seek out and save the lost.”

We need only to remember how, on his road to Jerusalem, Jesus kept seeking out and saving the ones whom people thought were helpless and hopeless cases. Remember when Jesus cast the demon out of the young man in Gerasene, a non-Jew, living in the graveyard, ritually unclean and a true outcast, and Jesus restored him to wholeness. Or that Chief Tax Collector in Jericho, the epitome of corruption, the lowest of the low, who encountered Jesus and was transformed. We look at some people and pass judgment, oh, he or she is a lost cause, or we look within ourselves and feel ourselves to be so lost, so unworthy.

While we put those who lived godly lives on the pedestal as saints, Jesus came to seek out and save the lost, the very lost, and if that is God’s intention,

Jesus will not fail, like the good shepherd who did not give up until he found the one that went missing. All these things, Luke has told us in this Gospel.

The ways of God are not the ways of humanity. God's judgments are not our judgments. Things do not work in heaven the way they work on earth – thank God! In the resurrection from the dead, even the lowliest of the society would be like angels and are children of God.

Those who were dehumanized in this age will be restored in that age. Those whose humanity had been disregarded, who were treated as nobody, who suffered misunderstanding and whose lives were disrupted and deprived of good things by the conditions in the human society, will be sought out and found, and God's whole creation will be restored. While we have our breath on this earth, may we always collaborate with God in this great salvation story.

Thanks be to God, our God of the Living, for we and our loved ones who have gone before us, are forever and always One.