

**GOSPEL READING: Luke 20:27-38**

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This passage from Luke always reminds me of the kinds of conversations that may happen between parents and children. A child, trying to defend their right to expensive shoes or to go to an unsupervised party, says, “But everyone’s wearing them! Everyone will be there!” And inevitably, the parent replies, “And if everyone jumped off a bridge, would you?” It’s a cliché exchange. The parent’s question is meant to point out absurd logic.

That’s a bit like what’s happening in our story from Luke. The Sadducees come to Jesus with a question meant to point out what *they* think is absurd — the idea of resurrection. They tell a story about a woman who married seven brothers in turn. “In heaven,” they ask, “whose wife will she be?”

Their argument is rooted in an old law in Deuteronomy, where if a man died without children, his brother was to marry the widow and have children in his name. It was a way of keeping the family name alive, the property together and ensuring that the widow would be cared for. The Sadducees were a small but powerful group of religious leaders. They only accepted the first five books of the Hebrew Bible — Genesis to Deuteronomy. And because those books don’t mention resurrection, the Sadducees rejected the idea entirely.

They think they have laid a clever trap. They assume that anyone thinking clearly will agree with them: there is no life after death. Surely, they think, no intelligent God could come up with something as messy as eternal life if it leads to problems like this!

But their question reveals something deeper. They assume that if there *is* a heaven, it must look exactly like this life — same relationships, same systems, same rules. For them, what you see is what you get, now and forever. I’ve heard people joke of hoping that heaven has endless golf, or mile long buffets, but Jesus wants to shift their perspective and ours.

Like a baby in the womb who cannot yet understand the joys and responsibilities of living, we cannot yet grasp eternal life. As Paul writes, “Now we see in a mirror, dimly.” (1 Corinthians 13:12)

Jesus points out that they’re trying to understand eternal life through the lens of this life — and that doesn’t work. The social, legal, and family arrangements that are necessary here belong to *this age*, not *the age to come*.

Even as we hear Jesus’ words today, we hear them differently depending on our experiences. For some, especially those who have lived through difficult marriages or enjoyed a single life, the idea that there will be no marriage in heaven can sound like really good news. For others, who have known lifelong love and companionship, it sounds at the very least unsettling.

It’s important to remember that the Sadducees who approach Jesus don’t really want an answer. They mean to humiliate and incriminate Jesus - they ask about resurrection to win an argument, not because it matters personally.

To ask of resurrection in a hospital room or a nursing home, to ask it in those long hours of the night after a difficult diagnosis has been given, the question is no longer simply intellectual. Only then can we hear the echoes of Jesus speaking to Martha, weeping for her brother, saying "I am the resurrection and the life". To the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise." Or as John's Gospel reminds us, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life."

Jesus' response isn't primarily to give us an update on marriage, but to declare that indeed there is resurrection; for God is a God of the living. In Jesus' own death and resurrection we see clearly the fact that God has triumphed over the forces of death and decay, and brought new life about. God's new creation won't just be this world made a little better; it will be *a whole new world*, where injustice and suffering are made right. Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor 13)

And that changes how we live now.

Some of you have faced death in armed conflict, many of us remember family or loved ones who did the same. For some, faith in Jesus' promise of resurrection made all the difference in the trenches, barracks, service, and sacrifice.

Because in every generation, the resurrection has turned fear into courage. Early Christians faced lions in the arena singing hymns because they knew death was not the end. Dietrich Bonhoeffer resisted Hitler's tyranny, trusting that the risen Christ ruled even from a prison cell. And in South Africa, believers like Desmond Tutu stood unflinching before the powers of apartheid, proclaiming that love and life would have the last word. The resurrection made them bold—because when Christ is risen, no darkness, no empire, and no evil can prevail. Death and terror could not have the final word, even under regimes marked by torture, disappearance, and fear.

The people of resurrection have a defiant hope: God's life and truth are stronger than the power of the state, and that faithfulness to God is worth any cost. God's people of resurrection resist even the first odors of death dealing injustice. Standing on guard to protect the vulnerable, the trampled, those whom evil has tried to mark as expendable.

The resurrection of Christ gives ordinary people extraordinary courage. For to know that the worst thing is never the last thing, and that because Christ lives, we can live — and love — without fear.

When the great Puritan pastor John Owen lay dying and said to his secretary, "Write: I am still in the land of the living." Then he paused and corrected himself: "No, write — I am still in the land of those who die, but I hope soon to be in the land of the living."

May the God of the living —  
the God of Abraham and Sarah, the God of Isaac and Rebekah, the God of Jacob and Rachel —  
God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
be praised in our living and our dying, now and forevermore. Amen.