

Luke 20:27-40 – Pentecost 22 – Stewards of Our Words – November 9, 2025

+In Nomine Iesu+

The Sadducees come to Jesus in our Gospel reading today. And that sounds like a good thing. But they come to challenge Him. The chief priests and the scribes have already done something similar in this same chapter. They bring their most difficult theological questions.

Now, they aren't really looking for answers. Many people with theological questions aren't. In fact, they think their question is unanswerable. It's a trap. And they want to expose Him as a false teacher—someone without answers to the most difficult questions. It is resentment dressed up as moral virtue.

The Sadducees are a priestly and aristocratic movement. And they are rationalistic. Only the books of Moses hold authority for them as Scripture. And they dislike the oral tradition of the Pharisees.

But they do have something in common with the Pharisees. They share an opposition to Jesus. He is a troublemaker in their eyes. And they will do all that is within their power to discredit Him.

And the question is about the afterlife. It is about the resurrection. And here, they *oppose* the Pharisees. The Sadducees don't believe in the resurrection. This life is all there is. It's a brutal position. And maybe some today entertain this too—or at least practically. They say things like, "You only live once." "This life is all there is."

The question is about the resurrection and kinsman-redeemer marriage. It is a little complicated. But it comes with a story about a woman who marries seven brothers—albeit one at a time. Each of the seven marriages ends childless—and in death for each husband.

There is a touch of humor. One gets the feeling that it is dangerous to marry this woman. She is a black widow of sorts. And then—in the end—she dies as well. And so they ask, "In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be?"

Again, they aren't really looking for an answer. They are convinced that this question exposes a flaw—a lack of logic—when it comes to the resurrection. It is a theological conundrum that the Pharisees—and now Jesus—cannot solve.

The question is crucial for three reasons. Some Jews did believe in a resurrection—the Pharisees and their followers. And the resurrection of Jesus is His Gospel message. Finally, the resurrection of the faithful is the centerpiece of Christian hope. So, for all the humor of the question, it must be addressed very seriously.

Sometimes Jesus doesn't answer questions—when His critics merely attempt to embarrass Him—or trip Him up in His words. In fact, He refuses to answer a question about His authority in this same chapter. But here, Jesus sees the benefit of answering. And He does so for the good of His hearers—then and now.

And Jesus replies at two levels. First, He notes that there are ways in which resurrection life—the afterlife—is not like this life. There will be no marriage in the world to come. Since people will live forever in the resurrection—they will not die anymore—there will be no need for marriage—no need for offspring to replenish the earth. We get the sense that relationships will operate on a different plane.

In this sense—and in this sense only—we will be like the angels. We will not marry because we live for eternity. There isn't a need to be "fruitful and multiply and subdue the earth."

And here, there is a subtle dig at the Sadducees. They don't believe in the resurrection. But they didn't believe in angels either. They reject the supernatural—which is something of a problem with Jesus around. It will be a bigger problem on the last day. And Jesus shows that those considered worthy of eternal life—those with faith in His power to save—will experience the resurrection of the just.

And this reveals our second and more subtle point. Although we believe in the resurrection of all people—including the Sadducees—much to their surprise—not everyone will be considered worthy of that eternal life. And this is serious stuff. Our souls are at stake. Religion is not a hobby.

In rejecting Jesus—what the Sadducees are there to do—they reveal that they are not worthy of the eternal life that Jesus brings. These are powerful, influential, and even religious men. But in rejecting Jesus—they risk being excluded from the world to come.

Worthiness is a tricky idea. And we don't want to say more than Jesus is saying here. Remember that we have tax-collectors and sinners following Jesus at this point. The call of Jesus is the thing that makes all the difference. And He calls us too.

Following Jesus into the resurrection seems to be the worthiness that we need. It is the righteousness of Christ that makes us ready. His grace changes our disposition to Him—from doubt to faith. And that comes as we give ourselves over to His answers. We listen to His Word.

And third, Jesus solidifies His argument. And He makes His point from the Books of Moses—the Scriptures that the Sadducees claim to uphold. Jesus notes the familiar trio of Patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And then Jesus notes our Old Testament reading today from Exodus. God is the God of the living, not the dead. And even long after the death of these Patriarchs, they still remain. They exist in the midst of God.

So, the promise remains. And God is the God of promise for these Patriarchs—even as He is for us. And because they continue to live in this way—then there must be a resurrection. The dead will be raised. His people live in Him—awaiting the promises to be fulfilled.

In all of this, Jesus' reply takes two forms. First, the marriage dilemma that the Sadducees present misunderstands the afterlife—all because marriage does not continue there. Life is different in some fundamental ways. Like the angels, the resurrected are eternal. And thus, the original instruction to be fruitful and multiply has been fulfilled. Their dilemma is easily resolved.

And second, Scripture teaches the resurrection—even in the books of Moses. Although the resurrection is revealed more clearly elsewhere—it is still revealed in subtle ways in how God speaks of the Patriarchs to Moses. If God makes promises to them—and the afterlife is even called Abraham's side in chapter sixteen—then the resurrection seems an appropriate deduction.

The reaction to Jesus is instant. Some of the scribes—here probably Pharisees—like His answer. They even call Him Rabbi—Teacher. Maybe we see faith in a few of these men.

Jesus also silences His opponents. He has answered so well, they have nothing left to say. Just as we have seen with these earlier interactions, His enemies have been rebuked and corrected. They run out of objections. And, as difficult as it may be for them, this is a gracious moment. Jesus has answered their most perplexing question. He has spoken well. He always does.

Although this controversy deals with the unique theological problem of the Sadducees, we can find important applications for ourselves. The resurrection is such a central teaching of our Christian faith. It should be our conversations about the faith—not just at Easter. It shapes our thinking about accountability before God, judgment, and eternal life.

Without a resurrection, death would be the end. Our accountability before God would be limited to this life. And judgment and eternal life become meaningless concepts. Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

Paul spends time with this whole idea in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul speaks about how Jesus' resurrection is the proof of resurrection day for the rest of us. And He makes clear the necessity of the resurrection for his Gospel.

“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain...your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

It has often been said that death is the great *equalizer*. We all must die apart from the return of Christ within our lifespan. I suppose that is true enough. Hebrews 9, reminds us, “It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.” But the resurrection is the great *opportunity*—since we will be raised—and Jesus takes us into the new creation that has no end.

Now, we may bristle at Jesus' comments about marriage in the resurrection. And this does come as a bit of a surprise. Part of our struggle may come from the disconnection we have made between marriage and children. We have limited marriage to a place of romantic and personal fulfillment. And our society has even tried to define marriage apart from God's design. But here, Jesus reveals marriage as something for the family—something with more relational concerns.

But in the resurrection, we must remember that the quality and purity of our relationships will extend far beyond what marriage provides today. Sin will no longer cloud our relationships. The quality of interaction in the world to come will be directed fully by the presence of God. The absence of evil and the presence of God make marriage—as a supportive, productive, and protective institution—unnecessary.

For those who hesitate at this remark because their marriage has been good, just remember, eternal life will be even better. And for those whose marriages sound a little bit more like the woman in the Sadducees' story, God will finally set things right.

Now, we have our own theological questions. Maybe our Gospel reading even raised a few more for you today. Why are some saved and not others? Why would a good God send anyone to hell? Why is their evil and suffering in the world—especially in my own life?

I am not going to answer all of these today. And there is nothing wrong with these questions in and of themselves—especially as we seek answers from the Scriptures—as we seek answers from Jesus. And we even find hints of some answers to these kinds of questions right here in our text.

The problem arises when we ask, but we aren't seeking answers. We ask, but don't listen the answer. When we use these questions as an excuse to neglect the church—to reject the faith—to inflate our own opinions—to live however we please. Clearly, as Jesus reveals right here, our thoughts about God and eternal life have consequences.

If we learn anything from this passage, remember that resurrection day is coming. There is more to life than what exists on this side of death. We need to be prepared to meet that day in faith. We should hear Jesus' words and begin to take an eternal perspective. We should even begin to sound like Jesus as He talks about eternity—being stewards of our words—being stewards of our lives—until His return.

Let's build a profound connection between life and eternal life. The kingdom of heaven is among us even now—in Word—and in the Sacraments. Life after the resurrection is eternal. Jesus takes us to a transformed world. We will be like the angels—living forever—with a renewed sense of purpose for living. All of our relationships will be transformed. It is hard for us to appreciate how wonderful it will be to exist in a world without sin.

Jesus tells us that we will be like the angels—not with wings—but in life without end. John says something even more. We heard this verse just last week. In 1 John 3, he says, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."

This is the hope that Jesus sets before us. This is the call for all who will hear. Jesus doesn't just affirm the Sadducees in their error. He didn't do that for the Pharisees either. And He won't do that for us. Instead, He sets things straight. He teaches rightly about the afterlife. He points us to the resurrection. And He leaves us hoping in a life that we will live in Him—for all eternity. And He invites us into that eternal life right now.

And in Jesus, it is not just where we are going that makes the hope so great—but who we will be when we get there. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+