

²⁷ Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus ²⁸ and asked him a question: "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers; the first married a woman and died childless; ³⁰ then the second, ³¹ and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. ³² Finally the woman also died. ³³ In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will she be? For all seven had married her." ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage, ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ Indeed, they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. ³⁷ And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. ³⁸ Now he is God not of the dead but of the living, for to him all of them are alive." ³⁹ Then some of the scribes answered, "Teacher, you have spoken well." ⁴⁰ For they no longer dared to ask him another question.

Response to the Word

One: This is the Word of God for the people of God

All: Thanks be to God!

Luke 20:27-40

11/09/2025 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

"The God of the Living"

Pastor Amy Terhune

"The soloist had laryngitis. The flower girl was ill with pneumonia. The ring bearer had an accident in his blue-velvet pants just before the ceremony, and in all the pandemonium in the lead-up to the wedding, the mother-of-the-groom left her dress at home by mistake. Neighbors agreed to drive it the 80 miles over to church, but mom was still greeting guests in the narthex in her robe and slippers 15 minutes before the wedding was supposed to start.

"Things continued to go downhill after the ceremony. It was the coldest day in Maryland in 20 years. The severe cold caused the water main at the church reception hall to break, so the toilets functioned only because the reception line was turned into a bucket brigade. But that's not all. In the apartment just below the church reception hall, the resident had gone out of town and left his oven on in order to keep his boa constrictor from getting cold. So as newlyweds Tim and Melissa Donnelly prepared to leave their reception, the building caught on fire.

"And if that wasn't bad enough, Tim had borrowed a 1941 Cadillac for him and his bride to ride away in. It got stuck in the ice in the church parking lot, so Melissa stuffed her gown into the back seat of a two-door compact car for their grand exit. Of course, there was a blizzard on their honeymoon, which trapped them at the resort. Reflecting on it all at their 25th Anniversary, Tim and Melissa had figured out early on that if they could survive their wedding, they could survive anything. [Reprinted from the article "Wedding Wackiness," Marriage Partnership magazine (Summer 1999), published by Christianity Today International, Carol Stream, Illinois; as used in "About Marriage" by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.]

In our scripture lesson today, we meet a bride and seven grooms, none of whom seem to long survive the wedding. As Luke tells it, some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus

and pose a hypothetical situation. Oldest brother marries a girl and dies without children. So the next and the next and so on down the line all marry her in due course, and all die childless. Finally, she passes on as well. They are referencing something here called Levirate marriage – a provision in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, which is designed to protect a family's property and a woman's right to support. In ancient times, if a married man died childless, his brother would marry the widow and father children in his brother's name in order to keep the property in the family. If he doesn't do so, the widow has the right to spit on him and pull off his sandals at the city gate, which is apparently a great insult in ancient times, although if I had been the fifth, sixth, seventh brother in the lineup, I may well have let her spit on me and take my sandals rather than marry her, given the luck of my elder brothers, but of course, that's not the point of the story. In the resurrection, whose wife will she be?

It's an absurd question based on an absurd scenario. It's certainly not a question asked in good faith or genuine interest. The Sadducees who ask the question do not expect that Jesus has anything valuable to teach them. They're clearly not interested in a real, in-depth conversation about resurrection or what God might be about to do. The question is designed to entrap. That's the entire purpose of the question. The Sadducees fully intend to make themselves look smart at Jesus' expense.

Which was not altogether uncommon in those days. Debate was a form of entertainment and education all rolled into one. But it was also a means of power and prestige. There were so many differing factions and splinter groups that the debates raging on the temple squares determined whether or not one had opportunities to advance. The two factions we hear about most often in the gospels are the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

The Pharisees' problem was that they were so close and yet so far. They believed in personal holiness just as Christ did. They believed that one's actions must demonstrate that faith, just as Christ did. They believed in resurrection and eternity. In fact, the only major point of contention between the Pharisees and Christ was how to get there. The Pharisees wanted to follow a strict set of rules and be good enough and pure enough to earn admission. Christ says, "you'll never earn your way in—what you need is God's grace."

The Sadducees were another matter altogether. They were the rich aristocracy—the high priests and learned men. They had few followers among the general populace, but it didn't matter because they had most of the money and most of the power. Their entire theology was tied to the temple, so when the temple was destroyed in 70 AD, they disappeared. The Sadducees followed only the first 5 books of the OT—known as the Pentateuch or the Books of Moses. If it wasn't written down in the books of Moses, then it wasn't of God. Period. And since there are no laws of Moses regarding resurrection, they took the stance that resurrection was not a cosmic or divine reality. The Sadducees had watched the Pharisees try to trap Jesus with their questions about authority and about paying taxes to Caesar—and fail miserably. So they flexed their muscles a bit and said to themselves, "We're the bigwigs here, we'll handle this fast-talking little magician, thank-you very much." And so they came at Jesus with this question about resurrection. One bride for seven brothers—whose wife will she be?

To which Jesus responds (essentially): you idiots! There's no marriage in heaven! If one happens to be living in a violent and abusive situation, that sounds like good news. But if you are or have lived with a fulfilling and meaningful marriage experience, this may sound troubling. What do you mean, there's no marriage in heaven? Are you telling me that the love of my life – the person I may well spend decades journeying through life with together – will not be my spouse in heaven?

Friends, I'm not telling you that. The truth is, I don't know how it is in heaven – I haven't been there. But what I can shed light on, which is well worth considering, is the very different way that a first century resident of Palestine would have thought about marriage compared with today.

Keep in mind, first of all, that a first century Jew did not marry for love—that is an utterly modern concept. Marriages were arranged by the families. Its purpose was to perpetuate the family name and provide for the security of women and children within a patriarchal society. It was about status and protection—two things you won't need in heaven.

Second, keep in mind that a first century Jew did not have any awareness of human sexuality as it relates to emotional or spiritual health of the whole person. Sex was a primal need of the flesh for the sole purpose of procreation, and marriage was the acceptable social construct to meet those needs. Again, flesh and procreation are things that you will not need in the hereafter. The things we associate with marriage—love, intimacy, companionship—are things that flow freely and abundantly in the Kingdom of God. Presumably, one would not need rules to govern such things in Heaven. But if one has achieved some measure of these things on earth, I doubt they vanish when we go on to eternity. Rather, I suspect they will grow and deepen in ways I can't begin to imagine here and now.

Finally, keep in mind that the early church to whom Luke was writing was having a very heated debate about the value of marriage in the first place. See, they believed Christ was going to return any day now. They were looking for the imminent culmination of history. Why should one need to perpetuate the family name or protect the family assets if Christ is coming back tomorrow!

So, what does all this mean for us today as regards this text? "Well, I think it was Yogi Berra, the New York Yankees catcher back in the 1950's and '60's who in his own garbled way offered profound wisdom when he said, "the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing."

"In effect, this is what Jesus is saying. In the life of faith, keep focused on the main thing. And what is the main thing, but to maintain and nurture our rootedness in God, to embrace life in God's kingdom, a life of compassion and grace, of peace and self-giving love, of servanthood and hope. When Jesus speaks of the God of the living, he is prodding his critics to expand their vision. In effect, says William Willimon, Jesus is saying to that group of critical Sadducees, "Your questions betray your limited point of view, your narrow frame of reference. The resurrection is not just some extension of your world. It is a whole new world, the world as God intended the world to be." It is a world in which the woman of your story is "a child of God, not a piece of property." It is a world in which each of us lives as children of the resurrection. [2 ¶s adapted somewhat from *Life in the Real World*, Joel D. Kline, ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc; illustration on www.Sermons.com.]

So these Sadducees are not asking a question about marriage. In trying to expose Christ, they expose their own circular redundancies. Resurrection is not immortality, where life just goes on in the same state without end. Resurrection happens because death is an existential reality. Last week, when we celebrated All Saints Day, we heard the apostle Paul's words from Romans 6: if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. The Kingdom of God that Jesus preached about is a post-resurrection world – one that has overcome sin and death. It's a world radically changed from the one we navigate day to day. We catch glimpses of it because our faith trains us to look at the world and those around us with resurrection eyes. Resurrection is a basic tenet of our faith—it is what defines us. We lift out hands to the Living God who walked out of a tomb a couple of thousand years back. Christ's words to the Sadducees come from Exodus – from Moses' encounter with the Burning Bush, where God refers to Godself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He shows them truth from their own scriptures, and those words can speak to us as well: Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living..."

Someone once asked, "Will we know each other when we get to heaven?" Dr. W. A. Criswell, the beloved pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas has an answer to that question. He said, "We won't really know each other UNTIL we get to heaven." [from Michael Green, *Illustrations For Biblical Preaching*, Baker, 1993, p.184.] Jesus makes clear that our relationships will be different when we get to heaven. Will our

loved ones be there? Yes. I believe that emphatically. But the truth is that our relationships on earth build as many walls as they tear down. In a thousand ways, there's 'us' and there's 'them'. If I've got this right, there is only 'us' in heaven – that's how it works. We are connected to one another in and through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Jesus also speaks to the assumption that this promised resurrection only affects us when we die. But in fact, resurrection affects our today. Resurrection eyes correct our eyesight just as bifocals or contacts do—they help us see to world for what it is. They help us see God at work among us. They bring God's life-giving love into focus.

"Author King Duncan tells about a young man he met in the small town of Maryville, TN. Duncan had just finished speaking to a group on the healing power of humor. This young man came up to him to tell him about the death of his brother, and if I've told this story before – sorry.

"There were three brothers in their family. The family was quite involved in this small community and so, as youngsters, these three brothers were forced to accompany their parents to the funeral home for the receiving of friends whenever someone in the community died.

"As the boys grew into their teen years, they began to develop biases about funerals. For example, there was one floral display that all three of them detested. Anyone who ever went to a funeral home in the rural south a generation ago may have seen this arrangement. It is a wreath with a telephone in the middle of it and a ribbon fastened across it on which is printed the words, "Jesus Called." These three brothers disliked this particular arrangement intensely, and I can't say I blame them. Theologically, that just doesn't hold water.

"To make a long story short, one of these three brothers died as a young adult after a prolonged illness. The family was devastated. He was so young and he was a fine young man. But now it was this family's turn to receive friends at the local funeral home.

"You may have guessed it. One of the floral arrangements that had been set up in the chapel for the receiving of friends was the one with the telephone and the ribbon with the words, "Jesus called."

"The two surviving brothers were enraged. They hadn't exactly made a secret of the disdain for that arrangement, so who would have sent such a thing to their beloved brother's funeral? They quickly made their way to the arrangement to read the accompanying card. And there, they discovered a final loving note from their deceased brother. He had sent the arrangement to his own funeral as one last joke on his brothers. In a flash, said this surviving brother, their tears were mingled with laughter. [6 ¶]s adapted from "Whose Wife Will She Be?" by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.] And the laughter was healing. But it also allowed this brother a flash of insight into the reality of the resurrection. Their brother was gone, but not lost, and life was a gift to be treasured. The laughter helped them see how their brother wanted them to live on and fully embrace the gift of life they'd been given.

Friends, God has called us to live. God has called us to be bold, to step out in faith, to love actively and give generously and serve courageously. Resurrection is not just for Easter. Resurrection is for every day. God has called us to let resurrection claim our eyes, shape our hearts, guide our minds. God has called us to let resurrection frame both our 'right now' as well as our 'not yet'. We follow the God of the Living, so let us live like it. Thanks be to God. Amen.