

22nd Sunday After Pentecost November 10 2019

Luke 20:27-38

When you hear the word, resurrection. What do you think about?

What does it mean to you? Let me hear.

Let's put a finger in those and keep them in mind.

Now, let's set the scene for our reading.

For most of the fall we have been on the road with Jesus and the disciples as they journeyed to Jerusalem, this passage, however, takes place after his triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. In fact, he has already cleansed the Temple, making enemies of the chief priests and scribes, but endearing him to the people. While in the Temple he has been challenged by those same leaders, having had his authority questioned, asked about whether the Jews should pay taxes to the Roman Emperor or not. And now we get this question from the Sadducees about resurrection.

Remember, the Sadducees don't believe in the resurrection and, along with embarrassing Jesus, are out to prove how ridiculous the idea is. So, as most politicians do, they create an improbable scenario based on a real situation.

What they describe, the brother of a deceased husband taking the woman as his wife, called levirate marriage (from the Latin for brother-in-law), is enshrined into Jewish law by Deuteronomy 25 and seen in action in Genesis 38 and the book of Ruth. There were two reasons for this kind of marriage. First, it was a way of perpetuating the line of the brother who died. The responsibility of the brother

who marries the widow is to father a child by her that will be considered his brother's child. In essence, it is a way for the deceased to live into eternity. Second, and probably more important, it was a means by which the widow would be cared for and any other property of the brother's would stay within the immediate family.

The circumstance they describe of seven brothers marrying one woman and none of them having a child by her before dying is certainly an absurd fiction meant to get at their point... if there is this resurrection, well whose wife is she, Teacher?

Jesus knows, just like he did with the chief priests and those who questioned him about the taxes, that these Sadducees are trying to make him look bad. Yet, he responds truthfully by saying, you have fundamentally mis-understood the resurrection. You think it will operate by the rules that we have here. That it will look like this life. But it won't.

Jesus sets up this contrast between the way people of "this age" live (marry and are given in marriage) and how people "considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead" act. These people cannot die anymore and are children of God, children of the resurrection.

I think most of us make the same mistake the Sadducees make. First, we see the resurrection only through the lens of the afterlife. Then we make the mistake of believing that the afterlife will look like this one. While it is an understandable mistake (this is the frame of reference we have) it is also puzzling.

While Jesus (and others in the scriptures) don't spend a lot of time talking about the afterlife, there are some things we know. In the afterlife there is no more

death, no pain, no suffering. In the afterlife we will be closer to God. I take that in a spiritual as well as geographic sense. The reality is that all of these things are different from how things are now. So, all we really know is that things will be different, better, but different. And we don't know a lot of specifics about how.

This idea that the resurrection is somewhere out there, after this time on earth, I think we believe it partly because it lets us off the hook. Yes, I should live this way, but I'm in the real world now and we all know how impractical it is to love my enemy. Or whatever other expectation of Jesus seems most inconvenient to us at the time.

It's a bit like the procrastinating we do when there is a project we don't want to work on, we put it off, put it off, then...suddenly...it's too late to actually attempt the task, "Oh well," we exclaim, "at least I tried!"

When we think that resurrection is primarily about the life to come, there is no urgency in it. And, in many ways, it loses its impact on us. Okay, yeah, it will be nice, but for now I'm living this life. (It's easier, but it also kills us... more on that later)

I remember as a child being fascinated about heaven and what it was like. Who was going to be there, what the living conditions would be like? Would I be able to eat my favorite foods and not get fat? Will Papa be there and will he look as old and wrinkly as he was? Or young, like in that black and white wedding picture with Nana?

As I got older and as I read more scripture I found that I cared less for knowing what was to come and more for knowing how God is active, now.

I believe Jesus is doing in this passage what he has been doing all along in Luke, reminding us that faith is not just a passive thing, but an action word. Something that is lived in the here and now. God and God's power is not just something for some then lying far in the future. God and God's power is active now. Here. In this place.

Which means that we are children of the resurrection... now. That we are the living who have God as our god. That we are the ones considered worthy of a place in that age and that we in fact live in that age now. Live in the kingdom of God, now.

For in the waters of baptism we have died already and been raised. We have been resurrected already. We are what Jesus describes, those who cannot die anymore, because we have already died and been raised. We hear Paul talk about this in Romans 6 where he says, "We have been buried with Christ by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

Resurrection is bringing something back from the dead. To revive and re-vitalize it. To give it new life. Fresh life.

Now, think for a minute about resurrection that way. What in your life is in shambles? We talked about idols two weeks ago. What idols have hold of your life? What will not let you go? What in your life is stale, dead?

Did you hear this week about the Iowa Appeals Court case of the convicted killer who says that he "died" when his heart stopped 5 times during a medical emergency and therefore fulfilled his life sentence? Now the judge threw out his

case stating simply that either he was alive and must remain in prison, or he was dead and the appeal was moot.

It was a novel trick that didn't work, but for us... this is real. We are people of the resurrection, and in the waters of baptism we can die to the old self and be raised again as new people. Those things in shambles, those idols that have hold of us. We can die to them. Because the only way to be resurrected, revitalized, revived is to die. To give up all control and trust in the one who came down to us, Jesus. Trust that if God can raise Jesus from the dead. Then certainly God can raise us from the death that we are in bondage to.

It's hard. And scary. But is it any worse than the things that are killing us already?

It's hard. And scary. But we know that Jesus loves us in a way that no one in this world can. We know that God in Jesus loves us in a way those idols we worship cannot. Because none of them have resurrected anyone. IN them lies only death.

I have witnessed, time and again, the resurrection of people by Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Lutheran Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber talks about this. I've heard many people in church settings across this state and the nation each bearing witness to the fact that without the Good News of God given to them in Jesus Christ come down they would be dead. But through the power of God in Jesus, through the support of a community of faith. Through the empowerment given to them in prayer and devotion they have been resurrected from lives that were only taking them to the grave.

What does it feel like to think about resurrection that way? As something that has happened already. That is happening, now?

Siblings in Christ, we proclaim our faith each week in a bodily resurrection. A time when Jesus comes again and all who have died in the faith will be physically raised. This is indeed good news! A comfort to us who believe that one way or the other we will see those whom we have loved so well in this life in the next. But we are not there yet.

Even so, we live in that reality now. Trusting that we have a God who is active in this world, now. Is transforming, resurrecting us and this world, now. Thirty-two times in the Gospel of Luke Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God. It is what he proclaims, it is what comes near in him.

And that kingdom is different from the kingdom of this world. From the people of this age. For it is one where the hungry are fed, the thirsty have drink, the naked are clothed. Where those in need are neighbors whom we love by fulfilling their need, regardless of color, of immigration status, of sexual orientation, of wealth or lack thereof. It is a kingdom where our deepest faults and mistakes do not define us, but where we are freed from those things through the daily death and resurrection that happens through our baptism.

Now, this, this is a kingdom with power. This is a kingdom that can never be shaken. This is a kingdom that is here and coming. A kingdom that is always moving. Living. And we are part of this. Because we have been loved. We have been found worthy. We have been claimed.

And it is our privilege to live in that kingdom every day. To invite others to join us in that Kingdom. To remind ourselves and others, that we are resurrection people.