

Year-C, Pentecost 25  
November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013  
**By Thomas L. Truby**  
**Luke 20:27-38**

### **Are We Completely Mistaken?**

We are very near the end now, both of Jesus' pre-resurrection life as recorded in Luke and of our church year. Two more Sundays and we will end year C in the lectionary cycle and our study of Luke and we will not revisit it until 2016.

As we enter the story, Jesus has made his triumphal entry, wept over Jerusalem, driven the animal sacrifice merchants and their animals out of the temple and made the religious leaders so angry they all want to kill him. But the common people are spellbound by what Jesus is saying and so the religious leaders must wait until they can manipulate public feeling in their favor. Soon even the common people will tolerate and even join the religious leaders plan to kill Jesus. As everyone waits the tensions build in Jerusalem, and various political and religious groups take turns attempting to entrap Jesus, each group hoping to be the winning one that turns the tide against him and thus wins in their rivalry with each other. Jesus eludes them and one by one they fall silent.

Our story picks up as the Sadducees make their attempt and theirs seems more playful, like comic relief before the week's intensity sets in. Luke sets the scene. "Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him 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. Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; then the second and the third married her, and so the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her."

To us their story is a bit strange. First of all, it's obvious that this woman has a fertility problem and needs to see a doctor. Second, what's so important about the first brother having an heir in the first place such that all six brothers after him line up to provide him with one. And finally

when all eight of these people; the poor woman and her seven husbands meet in the here-after whose wife is she? It looks to be an insoluble problem and that's precisely the point. The Sadducees trotted this story out when they wanted to stump their resurrection-believing opponents. It is kind of a show-stopper and they were hoping to have some fun seeing Jesus struggle with it.

At this point some background may be helpful. In the time of Jesus the Sadducees were the upper class folk who only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament, those parts supposedly written by Moses, and in those books resurrection is never mentioned. Well, if God had intended people to be resurrected he would have told his friend Moses about it and Moses would have told them. But he didn't and that's why they believed the resurrection was not scriptural and just a fantasy. In fact, those in the elite class probably thought the notion of resurrection was just sour grapes for groups and individuals who hadn't made it like they had. Resurrection believers believed in a resurrection, even though Moses never mentioned it, because they were still trying to make something out of themselves unlike us Sadducees who had done that already. Even then people and groups were squabbling over how to read scripture and which books in the Bible were from God and which weren't. Some things never change.

While the Sadducees clever story scored debate points, it had a sad underbelly that even they felt. If there is no God-empowered resurrection, the only way a man could insure his continued existence was through having children and if a woman failed to produce the needed children before he died, the brother of the man should help him by marrying the widow and having children for his brother. This is why the rule had been put into the Book of Exodus in the first place—it was a way of achieving a resurrection of sorts through procreation. Since they believed God wasn't interested in maintaining on-going-ness, they would have to take matters into their own hands and do it through their progeny. The whole thing was driven by the fear of death, the fear of going out of existence: that dread felt at three in the morning on the day you celebrate your next birthday.

Their story stumper didn't even slow Jesus. He immediately responded in a way that undercut their arguments and gave them hope. "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 anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection."

First, let's talk about those who belong to this age. Those who belong to this age are dominated by an awareness of the approaching grim-reaper. When we are younger we know the clock is ticking and we must marry and have children, if we are to have them, before it is too late. Then we marry and have children and think about the age we will be when our youngest child reaches 30, 40, 50, 60, etc? We wonder; will I still be alive. How many more years do I have? Our finitude haunts us and we measure our lives with an eye to our end. "Will you still need me; will you still feed me, when I am 64?" Ah, the Beatles were young then. For those of us who belong to this age our imaginations are clouded by fears that there is no resurrection and we must somehow create our own through our children or the legacy we leave. And so we marry and are given in marriage and it's all driven by the need to ensure ourselves against the nothingness of death.

But what if the "nothingness of death" is only in our heads? What if it grows out of a truncated imagination that fails to understand the character and desires of God? And what if, all along, Jesus has been seeing God very differently than we do and trying to get us to see the God he sees? Jesus' God, his Abba, as he calls him, is incredibly effervescent, to use one of James Alison's favorite descriptors for God. God is effervescent, irrepressible, vivacious and full of light. The God Jesus sees is full of life and it is a life so contagious that it cannot be contained. It flows over into everything and knowing this, changes the way we think and act, and approach the earthly end of our lives. Resurrection is not a miracle that sometimes happens but rather the normal state of things on account of being full of life because that is who God is. The power and deathlessness of God is almost unimaginable to us. We permeate the water we swim in, and the air we breath with dark, senseless and futile thoughts, but the mind of Christ comes

from a different place. He wants to induct us into an age teeming with life and possibility and this life and possibility does not and cannot peter-out.

When Jesus prayed that God would forgive the people who were murdering him, he made all people worthy of a place in this new age and in the resurrection. Forgiveness is what makes us worthy; nothing else and nothing more. And with forgiveness as the connector we can't die anymore, because we are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. We participate in Jesus' resurrection and it has nothing to do with our progeny, legacy or procreation. Even the Sadducees would like this if they could trust God and refrain from their anxious do-it-yourself project insuring survival.

This is why Jesus takes a passage from Exodus, one of the five books of their Bible, the ones accepted by the Sadducees and uses it to show how even there God assumes effervescent on-going-ness. In the story of Moses and the burning bush, Moses speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He assumes they currently exist even though from a historical perspective they had, by the time of Moses, been dead for hundreds of years. Jesus then concludes, "Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."

Even the Sadducees who had raised the issue in the first place were impressed. "Teacher, you have spoken well," they said and then they hurried off not daring to ask another question. Perhaps they were afraid that he would convince them about the resurrection and God's effervescent power for life and then they would have to cease being Sadducees and figure out who they were as Jesus-followers. So they left, but as they did, a question followed them. They wondered, "Are We Completely Mistaken?"