


“Resurrection Question”
Sunday, November 6, 2016
25th Sunday after Pentecost

 **(Luke 20:27-38, NRSV)**

Question about the resurrection

Some Sadducees, who deny that there’s a resurrection, came to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies leaving a widow but no children, the brother must marry the widow and raise up children for his brother.

Now there were seven brothers.

The first man married a woman and then died childless.

The second and then the third brother married her. Eventually all seven married her, and they all died without leaving any children.

Finally, the woman died too.

In the resurrection, whose wife will she be?

All seven were married to her.”

Jesus said to them, “People who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage.

But those who are considered worthy to participate in that age, that is, *in the age of the resurrection from the dead*, won’t marry nor will they be given in marriage.

They can no longer die, because they are like angels and are God’s children since they share in the resurrection.

Even Moses demonstrated that the dead are raised – in the passage about the burning bush, when he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

He isn’t the God of the dead but of the living.
To him they are all alive.”

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks, be to God.

[2ND Service: Affirmation of Faith]

[MESSAGE]

Are these guys serious?

This story of the poor woman who married her husband AND all 6 of his brothers is really comical to us.

I think that's because we have no cultural understanding of the ancient laws involved in this scenario.

Moses had good reasons for establishing these marriage laws that had to do with securing the legacy of a family and providing for surviving widows and children.

These same arrangements make no sense in our culture and we simply can't imagine a situation where such a thing would happen.

So, we need to find a way to figure out how to let this story speak to us within a completely different context today.

Who does the widow represent?

What is Jesus talking about?

What do we learn about resurrection?

Let us pray...Lord, the idea of resurrection is a mystery to us and we rely on your words to guide us to better understanding. Help us today to know what is important about the life you have in mind for us. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

We need to start by talking about the hypothetical posed by the Sadducees.

Clearly they are not asking their question because they want to know the answer.

They take an ancient practice to the extreme to show that the whole idea of resurrection was foolish.

They are asking this absurd question to trap Jesus into saying something blasphemous.

He does not take the bait.

The Sadducees do not believe in any resurrection.

So, they make fun of this belief by setting up an impossible situation and hoping that Jesus will stumble trying to explain how it will work out.

As usual, Jesus uses their own context to teach about the nature of heaven, trying to help them see where they have missed the point.

What we need to notice here is the status of this woman and who she represents.

Women in this culture were considered as property and widows were a particular burden on surviving families.

Jesus uses this status to teach about all those who feel less than valued.

Basically, Jesus assures the Sadducees, and us, that there is no socio-political structure in heaven; there are no social classes and no inequality.

That continues to be good news for today.

The mystery that Jesus reveals about the resurrection is that *“heaven is a place where those who have been dehumanized will be restored; those who have been oppressed will be set free; and those who have been treated as inferior will be raised up and called beloved.”*ⁱ

Women will no longer be the property of men to be passed around at will.

Heaven brings peace and joy not felt on earth.

Jesus says that God is the God of the living...the God of forgiveness, of new creation, and liberation.

Being the underdog on earth does not dictate position in heaven; oppression here does not determine rewards there.

Whatever bondage we are under on earth will not describe our life in heaven.

People who suffer the oppression of dehumanizing systems here, such as racism, sexism, and classism, often have a hard time seeing beyond their personal situation, unable to see any hope or promise of freedom.

We must be able to believe that *“the way it is”* does not determine *“how it will always be”*.

Suffering keeps us from imagining new possibilities, but faith provides hope for something better.

We can hear this truth today because God speaks to us in the present tense proclaiming the God was, is, and continues to be “*the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*”

God is still here, active and alive – a God for the living.

Jesus tells the Sadducees that the silly concerns of this world, like whose husband the widow will belong to, are unimportant in the grand scheme of things with God.

He wants us to realize that much of what we think is important **isn't important** in the realm of God.

Thoughts of heaven and what it might be like seems to raise questions for most of us.

Even though the question raised by the Sadducees is absurd, the questions we have may be more serious.

We may not speak our questions out loud, but we wonder about what happens when we die.

We want to know if we will see our loved ones.

We wonder about pain and grief and tears.

We even ask if all dogs go to heaven.

Jesus does not answer all our questions, even though we think he should.

What Jesus does is point us to a God whose faithfulness to God's people is immeasurable and inexhaustible.

Jesus offers us this vision so that we may endure all that life and death will ask of us.

So, what do we learn about resurrection from this story?

The first thing we learn is that things do not work in heaven like they do here on earth – *and thank God for that!*

We tend to use our human frame of reference to conjure images of heaven; *what life after resurrection could look like.*

It's what the writers of the Bible did – they did their best to describe God and God's realm in terms that ordinary people could understand.

We need to be clear, however, that heaven is not just another physical place like living in another town or another country.

Our eternal life will be spent in a spiritual realm that nobody can describe adequately.

Professor David Lose suggests “in resurrection we will live in the *nearer presence* of God.”

This story shows us a resurrection where God loves and cares for the disenfranchised, the widows, those persons considered disposable, discardable, and exploitable by law and the will of the oppressors.

It reminds us that **our God of the living** loves and cares for these same people **NOW – in this present life.**

Resurrection is not just about what happens when we get to heaven; it’s about the gift of freedom we receive because of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

It is freedom to live as Jesus lived, loving and caring for each other.

Resurrection is about hope for the hopeless.

It shows us that God is faithful in all things and that nothing we come against can keep us down.

In that faithfulness, we find enough to endure all that life and death will ask of us.

One of the most oppressed groups of people in America were undeniably the African slaves, taken from their homeland and forced into labor.


Much of their music showed a remarkable theological imagination that allowed them to see themselves in a different, better situation than the horrible one they lived.

One of those songs, “*I’ve Got a Robe*”, was written by people who were forbidden to own land and whose children were often sold away from them.

It describes a heaven where their worth and dignity are restored.

It is a song that defies dehumanization and hatred.

*I've got a robe, you've got a robe,
All of God's children got a robe.
When I get to heaven
goin' to put on my robe,
Goin' to shout all over God's heaven.*

 The good news of Jesus Christ is that God is the God of the oppressed, and the children of God will not be forsaken even in death.

We have this wisdom from Jesus, we have examples of this faith and belief in our tradition, and we are strengthened for our own lives here on earth as we walk our Christian journey.

Resurrection is especially for the least, the lost, and the left out.

It is a place of honor and respect as we experience the joy of God's love in the resurrection.

We too can proclaim:

“All God's children got a robe!”ⁱⁱ

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

ⁱ Westfield, Nancy Lynne, **FEASTING ON THE WORD**, Y-C, V-4, P-286, ©2010, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY

ⁱⁱ Westfield, Nancy Lynne, **FEASTING ON THE WORD**, Y-C, V-4, P-288, ©2010, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY