

“The God of the Living” (Luke 20:27-40)

Twenty-five Sunday after Pentecost

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. We are quickly moving towards the end of the Church Year and today is the 25th Sunday after Pentecost and also the third-to-last Sunday of the Church Year. Themes of the end are properly put before us and our Gospel this morning from Luke chapter 20 records some of the events before the end of our Lord’s public ministry. It seems surreal that the precious Son of God sent to save all people, full of love and mercy; full of compassion and grace would be attacked by so many trying to trip Him up, trap Him in his words, and discredit Him. The assaulters of the Lord line up in this section of Saint Luke’s Gospel. And though the *scribes* or Pharisees opposed the teaching of the *chief priests* or Sadducees; the two parties nevertheless found common ground in their goal to kill Jesus.

In our particular Gospel at Luke 20:27-40, it is the Sadducees who are taking their shot at Jesus. These particular Jews traced a proud lineage to the high priest under King David, they included lay people from wealthy and privileged families devoted to the temple cult and cut off from other Jews. At the same time they had a tendency to be “free thinkers” and “loose livers” (Lenski, 992), embracing Greek culture and were at the end of the day theological liberals. As a result of their weak Scriptural understanding they rejected the teaching of the bodily resurrection after death and they also rejected the teaching of the existence of angels, both of which of course are major teachings of the Christian faith.

Why would they reject such things? That’s a good question, but the ancient testimony of Ephrem the Syrian states that as “Sadducees” meant “the just [ones],” they had a tendency to take pride in their self-image that did not need a reward in order to trust in God (*Ancient Christian Commentary*, New Testament III, 312). Resurrection is a reward. It is also certainly true that angels are of great benefit. The Sadducees prided themselves, however, on needing none of this. They were the just ones who believed in God without needing any reward or benefit!

That is to say they were very proud of themselves and it is this of course that is the basic reason for their rejecting Christ and the teaching of God’s Word. They considered themselves above the Lord and above His Word!

But the more specific explanation for their rejection of the resurrection is revealed in the way they tested Jesus as recorded in Luke 20. The basis for their hypothetical scenario about the woman and the seven brothers all of whom became her husband was for them to be

able to ask Jesus a climatic question which they believed was unanswerable and would in the final analysis demonstrate why Jesus was not be followed: *"In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be?"*

Furthermore, the other characteristic of the Sadducees was to hold to the code of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament, the books of Moses). Moses was authoritative, not Jesus. They had in mind Deuteronomy 25:5-6 which is part of the Mosaic Law that was simply given to not allow the dead, childless brother's line to die out; the first son of the new marriage would be regarded as the dead man's child and thus his name and heritage would be preserved. But the Sadducees stretched this teaching out to the extent that they made a grand assumption and this is the real problem revealed: ***they assumed that the conditions of this world dictate the conditions of the next. If all seven husbands rise from the dead, then you face a ludicrous situation because the woman would have seven husbands after the resurrection! They therefore rejected the bodily resurrection.***

Fast forward to the 21st century and you soaking all of this in today: In a way, who can blame us for feeling extraordinary detached from this text in God's Word? After all, the last time I checked our church roster, none of us here are Sadducees and if you really are, then please see me after divine service, but wait a minute, it may be possible that *all* of us will need to see me after divine service and I'll need to see my pastor this week as well. Why? Because it is clear that our sinful nature shares all of the key points of concern this Word of God reveals about the Sadducees:

- 1) They were fundamentally proud and regardless of their peculiar cultural and biblical positions, their sinful nature is a reflection of our own: *we look for ways to qualify God's Word in order to justify ourselves...both our core beliefs and our core behaviors.* Ancient Sadducees aren't the only human beings who have ever done this. We do this whenever we decide that defending our pride is more important than following God's Word. I once had a parishioner who did not remain a parishioner for long who very carefully and sincerely explained to me why it was ok for her to commit adultery since she loved the man she was having an affair with and did not in fact (feel) love for her husband. Our flesh engages in this insanity. We are all in this respect happy Sadducees by a different name in 21st century America.
- 2) But this isn't the only way that we relate to their situation: once God's Word is qualified to suit our own agenda: we miss out in the power of God that is intended to be known and lived out through His Word. For example when the teaching of the forgiveness of sins is embraced, we experience "the power" and the liberation to

share that forgiveness with those who offend us, and even if they do not confess their sin -- and we are forced to wait until we can give absolution -- we can still rid ourselves of the bitterness in our hearts and forgive them in our hearts as we pray this liberating power coming from our Living Lord who forgives us every day: *“and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.”* But when we change the Word, we forsake its power. In the case of the Sadducees, their pride against God’s Word caused them to reject the resurrection! Does this happen anymore? I would like to suggest that it happens more often than we care to admit. No, we cannot say that this is always the manifestation of the sinful flesh, but it is certainly a very common one, because to reject the resurrected Christ is to accept compromises of what happens after death.

Now understand that left-hand kingdom cultural traditions are in many respects just that. No harm, no foul. If you like Halloween for example as one parishioner shared with me this past week, good for you! Enjoy your tricks and treats! My old professor David P. Scaer used to recommend that we get back to the Halloween costumes that essentially mock the evil one...as if to proclaim, “We can make fun of you, because you have no power over us.” Other tender consciences may not be able to handle such a philosophy as images of witches for example might make them feel as though they are violating God’s Word, etc. In these cases, we should serve and respect those consciences.

The point I am making, however, is that there is a general tendency of the sinful nature that seeks to detract from, distract from, warp, pervert, ignore, replace, cover up, repress, etc. the truth that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life and His resultant power to raise the dead which includes for those who belong to Him the resurrection of their dust into a living, real, glorified, and beautiful body.

But the flesh likes death (consider the immense abortion rate and the ready rationales for euthanasia; or consider the mad scenes of people going into airports and malls killing others and/or killing themselves). Make no mistake, the sinful flesh – regardless of where you locate it – hates life. Furthermore, I personally find it fascinating that our culture of course is infatuated with these ultimate compromises of the glorious and beautiful resurrection which include:

- a. Our fascination with zombies:



b. Our fascination with vampires:



c. And our fascination with death:



Once again, hear me loud and clear: if your faith is strong to be merely entertained by these things, then be affirmed that the kingdom of God is not a matter of food or drink or

Hollywood, but my point is this: there is also a bare spiritual dynamic which confronts the rejection of God's Word...it is a depressing view of life that misses out on the promise, the glory, the anticipation, the real excitement, and joy that is connected to what Christ has promised to those who trust in Him as the Resurrection and the Life. Let us not take our eyes off of this; let us not compromise on account of sinful pride and the prideful rejection of who Jesus really is, because He is the Resurrection and the Life for you and for me!



Jesus answered the Sadducees by teaching them that their assumption about the resurrection was all wrong. We will no longer be confined to the limitations that we now experience dear Christians. At verses 34-35 our Lord taught clearly:

“The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage.”

Our Lord's teaching is plain and clear: In this creation, God established marriage so that humanity could reflect the communion of God, multiply and fill the earth, and receive the post-fall promise of a Savior in the Seed of the woman (Gen 3:15). Christian marriage reflects the mystical union of Christ and his bride, the church...(Just, 776).” Augustine says simply, “Where there is no dying, there is also no succession of children (Lenski, 996).” Clement of Alexandria says, “...the Lord is not rejecting marriage but is purging the expectation of physical desire in the resurrection...[only in this life is] [t]his process of birth...balanced by a process of decay...(Ancient Christian Commentary, New Testament III, 313).” Augustine further clarifies: “The power of God is great. Why do they not marry husbands and wives? They will not start dying again. When one generation departs, another is required to succeed it. There will not be

such liability to decay in that place (ibid, 312).” Certainly marriage is a gift from God for many reasons, but let’s not be shy about what might be the most fundamental reason for marriage even when it is experienced through adoption (including the living out of the symbol of the mystical union) -- based on God’s very first command to people in the Bible -- Genesis 1:22: *“Be fruitful and multiply...”*. Quite simply, however, when we are raised we will never die again, so “[n]o replenishment is necessary in heaven (Lenski, 996).”

That is to say, Jesus completely dismantled what the Sadducees thought was an air-tight position. Jesus showed them to be wrong -- and to punctuate their error -- the Lord led them back to Moses in whom they placed their trust. Moses didn’t deny the resurrection, because already in Exodus

chapter 3 Moses was completely confirming the resurrection! In this Scripture given to Moses, Moses recorded the very words of God: ***“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (Exodus 3:6),” and our Lord taught the significance of these words at Luke 20:38:***

“Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.”

And if they live to him as the God of the living, then they too will live as He lives...you dear Christian – unless you are alive during the second coming of Christ – will be raised from your grave because your God, THE God, is the God of the living, not the dead...and all who trust in Him will live as Christ lives, risen, in the body, in the flesh! How can this be? It is because the blood of Christ covers your sin that leads to death; death is conquered through the blood that covers you with Jesus’ life; and it is because of the resurrection of Christ that guarantees that you too will rise. After all, this must be so, because God is the God of the living, not the dead. For Christ and for Christ alone these Gospel truths are now true of you who trust in Him (all from verses 35-36):

1. You are among the worthy to attain the next age, the next life and the glorious resurrection of the body through the gift of faith in Christ that the Lord has given to you through His Word and Sacrament. As a result in the next age...
2. You can die no more (v 36).
3. You will be angel-like in that your place in heaven will be fixed and never change (v 36).
4. You will be – forever – sons/heirs of God (v 36).
5. You will be – forever – sons/heirs of the resurrection (v 36).

Once again, why is this true for you Christian? It is because Your Savior Jesus – the Resurrection and the Life – is the God of the living, not the dead. To be found in Christ is to be

found in life; and to be found in life is to be found in the glorious resurrection. How are you already assured? It is because of where you are found this morning: receiving once again the body and blood of the Resurrection and the Life; this is the Sacrament that means you are one with the God of the Living, not the dead...come and receive this Sacrament, come and live, and come to embrace the resurrection of life that God has in store for you!