SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, NOVEMBER 9, 2025
JOB 19:23-27a; PSALM 17:1-9; 2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-5, 13-17; LUKE 20:27-38

BE A CHILD OF THE RESURRECTION

LUKE 20:27-38 *[Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus 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 in 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." Jesus said to them, "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. 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. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."]*

I love this time of our church year, but it can also be exquisitely painful. For the church, in her infinite wisdom offers us feast days and a liturgical season that focuses on death and things to come. We create space to remember our beloved dead, all who have died, and we embrace our grief. We ritualize it, feel it, and open ourselves up to the mystery of God who offers us so much more than the here and now. Last Sunday, as we celebrated All Saints Day, I was on the verge of tears all morning. It was my father's birthday, and he died nine and half years ago. My grief was palpable. I remembered my friend, Karla Koon, who died in May before she could be ordained a priest in June. I shepherded Karla through the discernment process when I was her

Rector and then became her close spiritual friend when I moved on from that call. I had the painful privilege of walking with her through a life-limiting diagnosis, subsequent surgeries and treatments, with small victories and numerous setbacks, as she hoped and longed for healing. Her final healing came on May 12 when she entered into God's glory. Karla was with me last Sunday and she is here today.

When I saw some friends last week, I tried to explain how I was feeling. I couldn't get the words out as I choked back my tears. "I believe so much in the resurrection," I croaked, "and the communion of saints." And then the sun came out, and we baptized beautiful babies and faithful adults, we renewed our baptismal commitment, and mingled our voices with the heavenly host, "the great cloud of witnesses" who surround us every time we celebrate the Eucharist. "I believe so much in the resurrection."

So today, I am quite annoyed by the Sadducees who mock Jesus' belief in the resurrection by asking a silly question. The "question" they ask is meant to be a joke that exposes the absurdity of believing in life after death. Like so much of our political discourse today, we mock our opponents rather than trying to understand their positions or hearing their stories — sacrificing our common humanity in the process.

Jesus, as usual, refuses to take the bait. He tells the Sadducees that the entire premise of their question is wrong. Their conception of God is too small. The children of the resurrection, he tells them, will neither marry nor be given in marriage. They will be like angels — heavenly beings beloved of God, for whom the rules and practices of earthly life will not apply. To grasp resurrection via earthly terms is impossible; it is a reality of another order entirely, an order we can only approach by faith.

Ok, Jesus, but we have questions. The resurrection has never made sense in human terms. The ancients struggled with it just as much as we do. They found it just as odd, just as unlikely, just as bizarre. The Sadducees in the Gospel story point out discrepancies between resurrection and the laws of marriage and kinship. Similarly, we point out discrepancies between resurrection and the laws of biology and physics. We find ourselves baffled by Easter morning. Try as we might, we don't know how to wrap our brains around an empty grave, a reanimated body, a hope beyond the grim finality of death.

In a real sense, this is a relief. Our struggle is an old struggle. We aren't the first to wrestle with ultimate things, and we won't be the last. Most importantly, Jesus understands. Note that his response to the Sadducees is not an angry one. He doesn't scold; he challenges. He invites them to stretch themselves; to see anew, to see again. He asks them to think beyond entrenched categories of what's possible and impossible, because nothing is impossible with God.

And then we have the Sadducees, the wealthy, conservative, religious elite who are always fighting with the Pharisees and looking down on them from a place of privilege. When I read the Gospels, I'm struck by how often the religious elite use the powerless and the marginalized to score points against Jesus. A mob of self-righteous men drag a terrified woman "caught in adultery" to Jesus and dare him to let her off the hook in violation of Old Testament law. Elite dinner guests berate a brokenhearted woman who anoints Jesus's feet with her tears. Today, the Sadducees concoct a story about a vulnerable widow who is passed from one man to another like human chattel, just to trip up Jesus. In each of these examples, the person in pain is expendable. In each example, human suffering is abstracted for the sake of argument, debate, and theological comeuppance.

No wonder the marginalized flock to Jesus while the privileged find him intolerable. Resurrection means living in circumstances that should render living impossible. Resurrection means enduring, overcoming, persisting, and surviving. Maybe resurrection only makes sense to those who desperately need it. Maybe the hope of justice, peace, rest, and consolation after death only resonates for those whose lives on earth are marred by injustice, anxiety, toil, and trauma.

The children of resurrection know that questions about Jesus are not finally academic questions. They are questions of life and death. They are questions with stakes so high, so consequential, and so profound, we dare not abstract them. Imagine what resurrection would feel like for the woman trapped in the Sadducees' story. Imagine her arriving — finally, *finally* — in a place where her worth and her belovedness don't depend on her husband, or her fertility, or her sex appeal. Imagine her basking in the safe, unconditional, and eternal love of the God who loved her into being.

If our questions and objections about faith require us to invalidate the lived experiences of actual people who are suffering in this life, then we are asking the wrong questions and favoring the wrong objections. The children of resurrection are children of love. Period.

The other problem with approaching Jesus as the Sadducees do is that their approach isn't intimate and personal. They want to *know* Jesus without walking *with* Jesus. They want to witness resurrection without suffering death. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus makes clear that only those willing to take up their own crosses and follow him can experience new life. The life of faith is not a spectator sport; to know it, we have to walk it. We have to risk intimacy with Jesus. We have to share in his life as it is incarnated within Christian community. We have to enter into the joy, the loss, the sacrifice, the wonder, the mystery, the grief, and the challenge of life in Christ. Resurrection knowing is a *lived* knowing.

In his response to the Sadducees, Jesus describes a realm in which people neither marry nor are given in marriage. A realm where no human being "belongs" to any other, because all belong equally to God. To me, this is a realm where women are no longer treated like property. A realm where sex, power, status, gender, marriage, and childbearing no longer bind or restrict God's children. A realm where patriarchy is obsolete, defunct, and dead. The realm Jesus describes is the kingdom or reign of God.

Does the idea of this realm bring tears to your eyes? Do you glimpse it now and then? We were baptized into it, and God wants us to linger there. "I believe so much in the resurrection… and the communion of saints" for they are surrounding us now. For "he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all are alive." (Lk 20:38).