

Job 19:23-27a  
2 Thessalonians 2:1-5,13-17  
St. Luke 20:27-38

Luke 20:27-38

<sup>27</sup>Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him <sup>28</sup>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. <sup>29</sup>Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; <sup>30</sup>then the second <sup>31</sup>and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. <sup>32</sup>Finally the woman also died. <sup>33</sup>In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.”

<sup>34</sup>Jesus said to them, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; <sup>35</sup>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. <sup>36</sup>Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. <sup>37</sup>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. <sup>38</sup>Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.”

There are three or four groups of people who ask Jesus trick questions throughout the Gospels. That and other things they do to give Jesus trouble...accusations and mutterings. Sadducees, Pharisees, scribes, an occasional lawyer. Because all of these groups are seen as enemies of Jesus we tend to lump them all together. - They are not.

As much as they disliked Jesus, they really hated each other. The Pharisees were the religious people who disliked the trappings of formal worship. They were interested in personal holiness. Today the Pharisees would be the ones preaching on street corners because organized churches just “don’t have the Spirit”. We know people like that. They were around in Jesus’ day, too.

On the other end of the spectrum were the Sadducees. For them there was *nothing but* the formality of worship. Worship did not count unless it was in the temple itself – the temple in Jerusalem. There was no Holy Scripture except for the Torah, (what we now call the first five books of the Old Testament). They viewed anything else as a liberal addition to the true word of God. The first five books of the Bible do not mention resurrection, so the Sadducees did not accept the notion of a resurrection. Today the Sadducees would be busy pointing out the

differences between “church stuff” and “real life”. The next time you hear someone say, “We hire a pastor to take care of the religious things.” - think “Sadducee”.

It was the Sadducees who were trying to ask Jesus a trick question in this morning’s Gospel lesson. They were going to describe a resurrection situation so ridiculous that anyone could see the idea of the resurrection itself was ridiculous.

They asked if a woman were married to seven different brothers, one after another, when this resurrection came about – to whom would she be married? The point of the Sadducees was to ridicule the idea of the resurrection. Their view was, if you get carried away with this idea of life overcoming death it will just lead to ridiculous situations.

The Sadducees were quite right. If we stay with what we know for sure, if we will simply look at death and accept it, things will stay on an even keel. Death has a tidy conclusiveness to it. There are no loose ends. We know right where we’re going.

If we want order, if we want certainty, we should stick with death. Because when we start dealing with life we don’t know where it’s going to take us. We don’t know what it’s going to demand of us.

The Gospel reads, “Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection...” They limited the power of God in their faith. When we limit the power of God – limit what he can bring to the here and now – then we escape any responsibility for change in the here and now. There’s no power to change anything. We just have to look at death and accept it. It’s sad, of course, but it’s easy. It doesn’t demand anything.

There is one truth in the Christian religion – only one. All the other truths of our relationship with God are based on the one central truth. That one truth is the resurrection of Jesus - the defeat of death.

It may be inconvenient, but Jesus did not look at death and accept it. He defeated it.

That message confronts us with the same uncomfortable choice that confronted the Sadducees. If we get carried away with this idea of life overcoming death it will just lead to

ridiculous situations. On the other hand, if we stay with what we know for sure, if we will simply look at death and accept it, things will stay on an even keel.

The certainty of the Sadducees sometimes comes out in us. We can look around us and see all the people who are lonely – and accept the fact that there is nothing we can do about it. Yes, it is death, but there is nothing we can do about it. Those people are not our kind of people. We will accept it and that will be that.

We get angry at people, often people we love. But we feel they are wrong and we have to let them know they are wrong. We can't see the possibility of letting them be wrong and go on loving them without at least making them feel sorry for what they've done. We feel that would be a ridiculous situation. Other people are sometimes just wrong and deserve our anger; we just have to accept it.

We talk about other people without knowing what we're talking about. But we think most of what we repeat is probably true. And that's just the way we do things. Everybody talks about everybody else. Let's just accept it.

We would like more out of our lives. It would be great if we could really choose what we are going to do. To make decisions about how we are going to talk and act. ... But we don't really have any hope for that. We can't overcome the constant distractions; we don't have self-discipline. We decide to accept it.

When we look at death, and accept it, it keeps things orderly. It makes no demands.

That was why the Sadducees did not understand Jesus. They valued the ordered certainty of death over the uncertain future and exhausting demands of a new life.

The temptation is still with us. It is a lot more secure to accept death. It is easier to look at the death around us and throw up our hands.

God wants more for us than that. He demands more for us than that. His own resurrection interrupts us. It breaks into an ordered acceptance of death and starts making demands.

Christianity means the resurrection. The resurrection has always meant breathing life into death. And God breathes life into us and our death. We are not Sadducees. We do believe in the resurrection. If we deny the resurrection in our life today, then we are refusing to let God live. We are accepting death. We are ignoring the life God can bring to the here and now – the power to change the here and now.

Let's not deny the resurrection. As Jesus says in the Gospel, those who take part in the resurrection "are like angels". Angels are messengers of God. That's what the word means. Angels work hard. Hard work is part of being alive; taking part in the resurrection; breathing life into death.

There are lonely people. We see them but we don't accept that loneliness. That's not good enough. We are called to bring the resurrection to those people.

There is anger between us and other people. Let's forgive them. That's the word of life, the resurrection. As always with life, we don't know where it will lead. It's risky business - forgiving people. It's not tidy. It can lead to ridiculous situations...actually working hard to build a relationship with someone who has hurt you.

We want more for our families than materialism. We want a deeper understanding of our neighbors than gossip. We want more for ourselves than a feeling of guilt and hopelessness.

It is comfortable to be limited, terminal. There is nothing we can do when we are bound by death. We only have to recognize it and accept it.

The people of God have been trying to keep Jesus shut up in a tomb for almost two thousand years for the sake of tidiness. But he won't have it. Just when we start deciding who we hate, and which relationships are irreconcilable, and how hopeless the poor are, and which wars are inevitable, and how we haven't the strength or the energy to do what we know God wants us to do...and all the other things we feel we have to be certain about to keep us from getting into ridiculous situations...and the stone rolls away and Jesus comes walking out of the tomb and into our lives.

It is the constant, daily, resurrection of God breathing life into us; making us alive; leading us into new possibilities for ourselves, for our church, for everyone around us.

Jesus says, "...he is not God of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive." All are alive. That means us.

It's upsetting stuff, this being alive. There are demands and responsibilities. We can't tell where it will lead. But we know that wherever we go in life, a living God goes with us.