

**November 10, 2019 First Sunday in Advent**  
**Pastor Carolyn Albert Donovan**  
**Peace Lutheran Church - Austin, Texas**

**GOSPEL**  
**20:27-38**

**Luke**

The holy gospel according to Saint Luke, the twentieth chapter.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

<sup>27</sup>Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to [Jesus]  
<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.”

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

We have a story we tell with the children...that begins like this...

“Time, time, time...

There are all kinds of time.

There is a time to get up in the morning.

There is a time to go to bed.

There is a time to go to school and a time to come home.

There is a time to work, and there is a time to play.

But what is time?

Some people say that time is a line, but I wonder what that would look like?

Ah, wait a minute. What is this?

Time. Time in a line.

This is time in a line.

Look at this. Here is the beginning.

It is the newest part. It is just being born.

It is brand new.

Now look.

Look. It is getting older.

The part that was new is now getting old.

I wonder how long time goes?

Does it go forever?

Could there ever be an ending?

It ended.

Look at the ending.

The beginning that was so new at the beginning now is old.

The ending is the new part now.

We have a beginning that is like an ending  
and an ending that is like a beginning.

Do you know what the Church did?

They tied the ending that was like a beginning  
and the beginning that was like an ending together,  
so we would always remember that for every ending there is a beginning  
and for every beginning there is an ending.”

We are at that time in the church year

when the ending and the beginning meet each other.

It can be hard to tell where is the end

and where is the beginning when they are all tied together like that.

In the church’s year, we practice being in all different kinds of times...

being in between where we are and where we hope to be.

I don’t know about you...

but I feel pulled between where I am and where I hope to be all the time...

(and sometimes there’s another tug of where someone else  
seems to think I should be thrown in for good measure.)

That pull gets stronger this time of year.

Yesterday, I drove past two different holiday craft fairs -

one at the YMCA and one at the Episcopal Church

who just had a sign at their parking lot entrance that said

“Sleigh Bell Lane...”

which made me angry in about four different ways at once.

First...the font was almost illegible - which is just bad advertising...

Second of all...I had know idea what I was meant to find

on Sleigh Bell Lane...because those were the only words I could see at  
first.

Do they just have sleigh bells there? Things to buy? To eat?

Reindeer? I don’t know.

Thirdly - no one needs sleigh bells here...

because no one needs sleighs here...

and last of all...certainly no one needs sleighs or their bells  
at the beginning of November!

I mean...I'm still eating the bowl of leftover Halloween candy...  
and pretending no one notices it's me.

And if I'm really honest...

my inner grinch is hiding that I'm angry about all this holiday nonsense...  
not only because it's too early...but because...even when it's not...

I'm sure I won't be ready to meet the expectations and hopes  
that seem to fill up these days.

I feel pulled between where I am...and where I hope to be...

And that's not a modern invention.

Folks in Jesus' day felt that way, too, I am certain.

And even though we don't know her name...

I think that the woman whose story is used to try to trap Jesus today  
was among them.

The question they are asking isn't an honest one...

Trying to prove the silly-ness of the idea of resurrection...

they ask Jesus what eternity would look like  
for a woman passed through a family of brothers in marriage.

It was part of the law that a brother would take responsibility for her  
if her husband died before she had a son...

because otherwise she would be in danger of poverty and possibly  
death.

A woman on her own in a world like that couldn't get by. Not without a man!

Making sure her husband's brother would take care of her  
doesn't solve the underlying problem of patriarchy of course...

but it seems to be all that was imaginable at the time.

So that's what the law said.

I'm not sure if Jesus found it more funny or more infuriating  
to be offered this riddle by his opponents.

And when he says that there is no marriage  
or giving in marriage in the resurrection...

I don't think he's trying to say  
that we won't be with the ones we've loved in life...

What I *do* think he is saying...  
to these people who treat a woman like a sort of family heirloom  
that no one really wants yet everyone feels obligated to keep...  
is that *no* person is a resented obligation in the kingdom of God.

What Jesus says, to the ones who are asking:  
"But who does she belong to, at the end of it all?"  
is: "NO ONE!

No one but the God who created her and loves her...  
She doesn't belong to any man forever...  
because she was never a man's possession to begin with...  
y'all just haven't figured that out yet."

That woman...had to live so much of her life  
between where she was and where she hoped to be...  
between being a burden and being a joy...  
between being beloved and being begrudged...  
between being seen as a harbinger of death  
and being seen as a bearer of life.

Today we enter Advent...maybe earlier than you were ready for.  
I'm never really quite ready for Advent.  
It usually takes me most of the season

to nestle myself into its dark warmth and wonder...

But this year we take cues from some of our ancestors in faith  
who took seven weeks to journey with Advent.

We often think of this as a time of preparation...

but this year,

I want to invite you to embrace it as a time of being in between...  
of being where you really are...and sitting with where you hope to be.

Because no matter how much we prepare or don't,  
Advent will end...and God will do God's work...  
and Emmanuel will come.

These weeks are the gift of sitting with that tension  
that circumscribes most of our lives.

Being where we are and looking toward what we hope to be.

This sort of no man's land is actually the church's home...

It is a waystation...

Jesus is always bringing us to the edges  
and inviting us to set up shop there.

Advent is a time to practice this...to hone our attention...  
to breathe into the tension of being in between.

We'll light candles for each of these seven weeks in worship.

At home, you might do something like that, too.

We'll post a list of themes for every day  
that you can use to focus your spirit throughout this season...  
and maybe share what you see or hear or think.

We can read Scripture and pray...

We can take a moment each day to set aside an item  
to donate to Hill Country Community Ministries...  
Or we can just practice taking a breath and telling ourselves that today...  
we are still on the journey toward what we hope for...  
and we are not alone.

You don't belong to anyone or anything that tries to claim you...  
not even your own expectations.

Welcome to Advent, friends.

It may be just the thing we need...  
on this journey between beginning and ending and beginning again.

Time, time, time.

May you feel the presence of the God beyond and above all time...  
yet who enters into it to be close to us...in this season and always.

Amen.