

Luke 20:27-38

Band of Puzzlers

Questions, questions, questions. Or maybe it should be challenge, challenge, challenge. Toddlers who are learning about the world are full of “why” questions. Why is the sky blue? Why do I have to zip up my coat in twenty below weather? Okay maybe that is more a teenager question. Why do I have to get dressed at all? As we age, we find the questions get harder and the answers not so easy to come by especially in this time of people assuming their opinions are fact. But maybe that is not so far from what Jesus was facing in this story in which he is being questioned, actually challenged by a group called the Sadducees.

Now to put this into context, Jesus is in the temple at Jerusalem, he has been facing the questions and challenges of chief priest, scribes, and Pharisees. Now that they have all been answered in ways that “they were not able in the presence of the people to trap Jesus by what he said; and being amazed by his answer(s), they became silent.” (Luke 20:26). Well, now the Sadducees figure they will take a run at it.

The Sadducees were like the rich elite of the temple who had wealth, power, and prestige, they also did not believe in resurrection. Rev. Dr. Derek Weber, says this about the group, “...to understand what is going on here. Luke tells us that the Sadducees do not believe in the Resurrection. But he does not tell us that the Sadducees were the well-to-do folk in the community. It makes sense if you think about it. When you have all that this world has to offer, why bother with something beyond it? When you can claim that being rich is a sign of God's favor and blessing on your life, then why not go all-in on that. Oh, they had a sense of eternity, but it was in their legacy and in their children. Your name survives you—that's what you were working for.”¹

It is why the ridiculous story and question regarding the widow who marries seven brothers and has no children with any of them. So, who will she be united with in marriage? Whose wife will she be in the resurrection? Again, a little background may be helpful as those of us, especially the women, may be having more than a little difficulty with this text.

At the time of Jesus, women were considered property, much of their value came in the fact that they could have children that would allow the name of the husband to carry on into the future. This was their hope. This was important to men.

¹ [Discipleship Ministries | Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost, Year...](https://umcdiscipleship.org/) (umcdiscipleship.org)
Accessed November 4, 2022.

Today women, at least in Western culture most are free to marry who they wish, or not marry, they may choose to have children or not to have children. There are also many women and couples who would love to have children but are unable to for various reasons and this type of text can really hurt when read with a 21st century sensibility. Needless to say, there are a lot of problems with this text when trying to get to the hope that is there. We have to clear away a lot of the clutter around culture and history.

Maybe we can set aside all of the entrapment that the Sadducees were playing into and look at Jesus' response. What has been really incredible in this story and the ones just preceding it is that Jesus continually meets the questioners where they are at. He didn't ridicule, but rather would turn the questions around and in that, plant seeds of understanding and hope that would maybe help someone. Remember there were crowds listening to all this bantering back and forth.

In the case of the Sadducees, they only saw the first five books of the Torah as the true scriptures. Those first five books are attributed to Moses and so Jesus uses his knowledge of scripture and speaks to them about resurrection from that perspective. He says, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; ³⁵but 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." (20:34) Jesus speaks about "this age" and "that age". We will live in two different times. "This age" is the time of our living in our human bodies, the time of "that age" is when we are fully in God's presence after our earthly death.

For Jesus, resurrection as God's children is the promise, and again, in facing the question, or maybe riddle is a better word, posed to him by the Sadducees, he goes to Moses, the one they revere, for an answer. Jesus quoting Moses and the Torah says, "³⁷And 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. ³⁸Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."

Moses speaks of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as ones who are presently living even though they had died long before Moses came on the scene.

Jesus met the Sadducees in their understanding. Though they wanted to demean Jesus in the eyes of the crowd, he instead took their question seriously. He saw the conversation, even this adversarial conversation, as an opportunity to engage others, not to belittle them with his knowledge and understanding, but as a way to plant seeds.

The seeds were seeds of promise, understanding, healing, and above all hope. Those who were listening in the crowds were not all well to do. Many were suffering in oppression, including the women for whom their well-being was tied to marriage and child bearing, but also for those who were oppressed by Roman occupying forces, were slaves, or just working their bodies to utter depleted-ness in order to care for themselves and those for whom they were responsible.

The scripture seems to say that the quality of life, the character of our lives will be different in the age to come, that time after death when we are fully living our lives as children of God in God's presence. Life after death is not just a continuation of this life in some beautiful way, where all our human relationships continue as we experience them now.

For now, much of this is mystery. It may well be that we do recognize each other in some special way based in how we knew each other in this life. That is good news for those who had loving relationships in this life, for others it may also be good news that their relationships with loved ones will be something different in a coming age, particularly if those relationships were harmful or burdensome.

What this story of the Sadducees and any of the previous stories of people questioning Jesus do is give us permission to ask questions, not in a way that demeans, or is meant for harm, but rather to say we don't really understand everything. Jesus is open to your questions, as is God. These stories show that. Jesus' response also shows that he is patience. In our time, in this age, we may find answers in scripture, we may also find answers to questions in our conversations with one another, as well as through study and reflection. Some questions just can't be answered in this age.

Jesus' example of answering questions can also be helpful in our time when we are in conversations with others. Regardless of the intent of another with their line of reason and questioning, may we have the presence of mind to meet them where they are at. Maybe we can listen and understand their context and from there plants new seeds of hope. As was stated, again by Dr. Webber, "Meet folks where they are, speak in their language, and then let the Spirit work. After all, we've got an eternity to work with."²

With or without questions our hope remains and is steadfast. In Jesus' words, and a little changing of pronouns by me, we can hear, "³⁶Indeed [we] cannot die any more, because [we] are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. Truly, blest be the tie that binds us to Jesus and not to the things of this world.

In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.

² Ibid.