

Twenty Second Sunday After Pentecost
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX
06 November 2022

Luke 20:27-38

For many Sundays now, Jesus has been walking towards Jerusalem. You remember the Feast of the Transfiguration in Luke, Chapter 9. At some point during that event, Jesus faces Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). He knows he must begin the long march that will eventually lead to his death. He begins his long journey right after this event. Now many weeks later, we have an episode that occurs in Jerusalem. He has finally arrived. Last week the Lectionary gave us an episode that took place in Jericho, approximately 18 miles from the city, but today, it appears as though Jesus has been in the city for a few days. The question then is, "What happened when he entered Jerusalem?"

The answer to the question is simple: (a) Jesus arrives to the city as we remember on Palm Sunday (19:28-40), (b) Jesus weeps over Jerusalem (19:41-44), (c) Jesus cleanses the temple (19:45-46), and Jesus begins to teach in the temple every day (19:47-21:38). So, we are in the section called "Teachings at the Temple" where Jesus is having a number of conversations with chief priests, scribes, and the leaders of the people (19:47). His enemies question him about his authority (20:1-8), he tells them the parable of the wicked tenants who kill the messengers of the master and finally kill the master's own son (20:9-19), they try to trap him by asking him whether or not it is legal to pay taxes to the Emperor (20:20-26,) and now some of the Sadducees ask him about the resurrection. All of these questions have one purpose only: to trap Jesus in some heretical teaching or statement against the Emperor which they can use to arrest him and kill him. These are not questions asked with an intention to learn more about the Kingdom of God. These were a litmus test of Orthodoxy and allegiance to Rome, and the consequences for Jesus are nothing short of death. In many real ways, Jesus is facing the Inquisition here and it is pretty apparent that they want him gone!

Now, let me say a bit more about the Sadducees. They were influential people who in many ways opposed the Pharisees' interpretation of the law. In fact, they opposed the Pharisees on a number of significant issues, which makes their joining forces against Jesus more remarkable. Even though many of the Sadducees were priests, they did not believe in the Resurrection of the dead, angels, supernatural intervention, etc. They were wealthy and powerful community leaders who sat in the Sanhedrin, were greatly influenced by Greek culture, and were close allies to the Romans. Now, before we analyze their question about the resurrection, let me give you a brief illustration about their behavior.

The ultimate insult kids dish out today is to look down their noses and snort, "Poser!" A "poser" is a "wannabe" who will "never-be." A "biker poser" wears a leather jacket, biker boots and drinks coffee from a Harley-Davidson mug, but has never ridden

anything more powerful than a John Deere on a Saturday afternoon. A “nerd poser” can talk a “geek streak,” has high scores on video games, but can't write a single line of computer code. In short, a “poser” talks the talk, but doesn't “walk the walk.” (Sermon Illustrations.com) In many ways, the Sadducees are “posers”. They appeared to be quite interested in matters concerning the resurrection, when in fact they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Now, there is no question that they knew the Levitical law. They knew that it was the law for the eldest brother to produce children for his deceased brother if he had died without children. The producing of sons ensured that the family would continue ownership of the land well into the future. The surviving brother has a duty to ensure the continuity of the family name. In many real ways, for many of the Israelites, resurrection is closely attached to children. We will have an existence in heaven when we die, but in a real way we will continue to exist on earth through the lives of our children. ([http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/.](http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/)) The Sadducees don't necessarily believe this, but they want to know if Jesus opposes the Levitical Law by negating the necessity of living brothers producing children for dead brothers.

Jesus answers the question in two ways: First, he challenges their view of eternal life. The Sadducees make it sound as though eternal life will be the same as earthly life. Jesus affirms that this life will be vastly different. In heaven there will not be any need for the legal agreements related to marriage. There will not be a need to make legal agreements binding people together, no need for equal distribution of goods, no need to provide for the other person, no need for physical or economic security. All these material needs will disappear as God himself will supply all our needs. For this reason, there is no need to enter into marriage, seen as a legal agreement. Jesus is not denying the Levitical law on this earth, but makes it clear that the law will have no effect in our eternal life.

Jesus gives the Sadducees another response which challenge their lack of belief in the resurrection. He goes directly to Holy Scripture, which the Sadducees claim as authoritative. In a way, Jesus says, "In your own precious Holy Scriptures God refers to himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He uses the present tense of the verb to be. “I am the God of...” If God is the God of Abraham, Jacob and Isaac who died many years ago, then obviously they remain alive to God somehow. Otherwise, God would have said, 'I was the God of ...' and not 'I am the God of...' Since God affirms that your ancestors are alive to him, how can you, Sadducees, deny the possibility of eternal life? Is God a liar?"

Not only has Jesus answered the question successfully, but he has managed to challenge the Sadducees inadequate belief of God. God is the God of the living and those who are “children of light” live in the Lord and will live forever. This understanding of God has deep implications for the way we lead our lives. If those who are in God through Christ live forever then it is obvious that this eternal life begins here on this earth. The future truly starts here. The problem is that at heart many of us are Sadducees. We “pose” as people who believe in eternal life, while secretly believing that

this world is all there is. And if this world is all there is then we must get our kicks here. We must eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we will die. We must indulge all our appetites and use others as tools to get what we want. If we only live once and life is short, then we must act quickly to suck all the marrow out of life as quickly and for as long as we can, as Walt Whitman would say. Pleasure-seeking becomes the only possible way forward for those who don't believe in resurrection. What is sad is that this life of self-serving pleasure, this endless appetite for excitement and excess, does not fulfill our inner yearnings, does not satisfy our deeper hunger.

The Sadducees believe you only live once, but this is not what Christians believe. We believe in eternal life with God. We believe that there is another life that begins when we die. We believe that Christ died to reconcile us to the Father, so one day we may be with him forever. This is the center of the Christian hope. We believe that only God can give meaning to our lives. Only he can feed our deeper hunger and satiate our thirst. Only he can give us life. Today, my friends I invite you to believe in a reality deeper than the reality of the Sadducees. Today, I invite you to believe in resurrection and to start to live your lives with eternity in mind. You don't have to get all your kicks here. Trust God and Trust Jesus. In the Father's house there are many dwelling places.

I believe this and believing this has made all the difference in my life. My God continue to bless you, Amen!