

Nov. 10, 2019 “Three Question of Resurrection” Luke 20:27-38

“What will resurrection life be like?” I think this is an incredibly understandable question given that we are naturally curious about what comes next, both for our loved ones and ourselves. It is important to know that this passage gives little specific or concrete details. It revolves, after all, on a hypothetical question the Sadducees ask Jesus in order to discredit him while simultaneously trying to embarrass their resurrection-believing rivals... the Pharisees. I don’t think I would have liked the Sadducees that much!

But even if the passage doesn’t paint a vivid picture, it does insist that resurrection life is different from life as we know it. This is, in fact, the mistake Jesus points out the Sadducees are making. Their question is premised on the assumption that eternal life is an endless state of “more of the same.” But resurrection life, Jesus insists, is different. The ordinary events and relationships by which we track our journey through this mortal life -- marriage,

childbirth, graduations, retirements and so on -- do not characterize our eternal lives because resurrection life is not merely an extension of this life but something wholly different.

“Is Jesus saying we won’t know our spouses, friends, and family members?” This is an understandable next question given Jesus’ words about not marrying and our previous emphasis on the difference of resurrection life. And it may be asked -- spoken or silently, consciously or unconsciously -- with some feeling, as most of us have a hard-imagining eternity without our loved ones. But as important as that question is, let’s be clear: Jesus isn’t addressing it here. He does not say we will not know those who have been dear to us, only that resurrection life will not be marked by the same features as this one. Indeed, given his next statement about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it seems that the relationships defining our current life may persist, certainly with God and likely with each other. Since the Sadducees are interested in what Moses said, Jesus calls their attention to where Moses speaks to the Lord as the God of

Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. It was the Lord, YHWH, who voiced that identification as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the Lord of Jacob. The Lord speaks in the present tense about these patriarchs. That present tense rules out the possibility that the Lord was once upon a time, but is no longer, now that they are dead and gone.

No, Jesus teaches, when Moses speaks of the Lord as God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses means that the Lord is and continues to be and everlastingly will be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Whatever relationship the Lord has with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is in present, not simply past tense, and can be counted on in every future we imagine.

“Is resurrection the same as immortality?” Okay, so very few may articulate this question explicitly, but you can nevertheless count on the fact that many of them regularly confuse these two things. Why? Because the immortality of the soul -- the belief that some essential or spiritual element of a person persists beyond the

physical death of the body -- provides a measure of comfort to those grieving loss, assuring them that at least a part of their beloved has not, in fact died. In distinction to this notion, we have instead confessed that while we really and truly die, resurrection promises that the whole person will in some way be united with God.

Do dead things come back to life? A better and more specific question is can life rise from death? Resurrection is not to be confused with resuscitation or reanimation of the physical self; rather, it signals the active work of a divine sovereign to bring about a complete transformation of the human body.

What is the lesson for the body of Christ? One lesson is that we must understand that the resurrection is the believer's gateway to hope. To believe in its power in faith gets to the very heart of why the church exists.

Another possible message that could emerge is that bearing witness to the good news of the kingdom of God may engender opposition. For example, Dr Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech on

April 3, 1968, in which the kingdom of God was interpreted as freedom, justice, and equality for sanitation workers, invited his death. How can the people of God, despite and in the face of opposition and ridicule, speak of the kingdom of God by addressing social woes such as the lack of justice and inequality? As God's people, it is incumbent that scripture be used as a lens through which we concretely name God's intervening work in today's world affairs.

It may well be that we find this an arid passage. It deals with burning questions of the time by means of arguments which a Rabbi would find completely convincing, but which are not convincing to us today. But out of the very aridity there emerges a great truth for anyone; Jesus used arguments that the people he was arguing with could understand. He talked to them in their own language; he met them on their own ground; and that is precisely why the ordinary people heard him. We will be far better witnesses of Christ when we learn to do the same.

In this scene from Luke's story, Jesus prays with me, and waits with all faithful people for a world in which justice will not be a crude compromise or a commodity to be bought by those with expensive attorneys, a world in which life will rise out of the ashes of crushed hopes and dreams.

In ways personal and beyond the bounds of logic, those who proclaim the gospel must be able to say to hearers that hope is not hope without the evidences of faith. In the end, and in view of Jesus' assertion that in heaven no one dies anymore but one becomes a heavenly being, like the angels in verse 36, the message of the resurrection that Christians must persistently announce is, "Seeing is not believing; rather, believing is seeing."

Whatever the limits we may experience about describing resurrection life, this passage nevertheless invites us to proclaim with confidence our faith that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob raised Christ from death and promises to do the same also for

us. For God is the God not of the dead, but of the living, both then and now.

It's just that simple, it's just that hard!

Thanks be to God.