

God of the Living

Luke 20:27-38

I have a nephew who loves a good argument, but only if he believes he can win! When he asks a question he already knows how it should be answered – and you can be assured that it will be slanted to his advantage. In our scripture we read about a group called Sadducees who asked Jesus a question concerning Resurrection. You need to know they asked the question, not for an answer, but to make Jesus look foolish.

Between 200 and 100 BCE, this group and another called the Pharisees disagreed over belief in resurrection when they emerged as opposed divisions within early Judaism. According to Sadducees, there was no reason to believe in the resurrection of the dead or belief in angels in the written Torah, which consist of the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy in the Hebrew Bible. Pharisees teachings made room for the writings of the prophets and the Psalms and made room for God doing different things than were written in Torah. Of special importance was acceptance by Pharisees of the book of Daniel, which blended traditions of wisdom and prophecy with the tradition of angels and biblical reference to resurrection of the dead, and a final judgment to everlasting life or everlasting contempt (12:2-3). Jesus' teachings were in line with the beliefs of Pharisees and in our scripture and elsewhere in the Gospel writings he participated in debates about oral interpretation of written Torah. Jesus skillfully interpreted that written Torah does present belief in God's resurrection of the dead.

So the question the asked was: Whose Wife Will the Woman Be (vv. 27-33)? Sadducees, who we already know did not believe in resurrection, open with this

question (v. 27). Their reference to what Moses wrote (v. 28) revealed their special focus on written Torah. They challenged Jesus about belief in resurrection from the dead by reciting teaching attributed to Moses in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, about levirate marriage (cf. Gen. 38:8). According to this commandment, a brother-in-law was required to perpetuate his brother's name by marrying his brother's widow, if his brother died leaving his widow childless. The creation of a fictional situation where a woman married seven brothers in sequence, and they all left her childless, provided the Sadducees an opportunity to humiliate Jesus in public about belief in resurrection, since they believed it would be difficult, if not impossible, for him to find a passage in written Torah that indicated to which brother the woman had "really" been married.

Jesus' response was that God is the God of the Living (vv. 34-38). In "this age" people get married and have children, but there is a "coming age," and there things are different. In "that age" our earthly bodies will be transformed into eternal "heavenly" bodies. In "that age" there will be no need for marriage and procreation, we will be like the angels, we will be "children of God." According to this reasoning since the husbands of the woman had become like eternal angelic beings, God would not give them their former wife as a wife in heaven.

Jesus' response is that humans who are with God in heaven have been given the nature of eternal angelic beings. They have this nature because God raised them from the dead into "living beings." If God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Exodus 3:6, this means, Jesus argued, that these humans are at present "alive to God." **Vernon K. Robbins**

Today is All Saints Sunday, where we remember those who have gone before us. Jesus said: "God is not a God of the dead." This does not mean that God is indifferent toward humans who are already dead. On the contrary, God has not forgotten them. God understands that we see human death as an enemy. "Where,

O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55) With these words, Paul rejoiced with gratitude for the victory of God in Jesus Christ over the powers of death. Jesus said in Revelation 1:18: "[I am] the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades." These keys are only in the Lord's hands and never in our hands. If we are his followers, then we follow the one who has these keys in his hands.

What Jesus points out to the Sadducees and to us is that eternal life is not simply the continuation of mortal life beyond death. We should not think of life after death as a continuation of this life that affords us an opportunity to complete unfinished works. Indeed, we humans have to do now what we can do for the good, such as help the needy, work for the improvement of the human situation, resist egoistic threats to fellow humans and other creatures. "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today'" (Heb. 3:13a).

Jesus made the point to the Sadducees: Death is the end of many things, but it is not the end of everything. Our death is not the end of God. We are living in a certain time, but God "alone is immortal" (1 Tim. 6:16 NIV). God does not release his creatures. In his compassion God puts us in his heart, and we will not ever be excluded from it. God's mercy is unending toward those to whom he is merciful.

The theologian Karl Barth wrote these words of the God of the living: "All live to him, from the Apostles to the forebears of yesterday and the day before yesterday." This sentence call our attention back to the text, about the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob (v. 37b) and the assertion that to God all of these ancestors are alive (v. 38).

What does it mean to say, "to him all ... are alive"? This means that all the humans who lived before us and who are now not among us are living "to God." The members of the first elected people of Israel, the members of the Christian church who were loved by God before our birth—none of them has passed away.

We are today, together with them, the complete people of the God of the living.

Eberhard Busch

On last week another nephew, not the argumentative one, sent me this song. I pray that it speaks to your heart as it spoke to mine as it reminds us that God is the God of the living...

I'm Having Trouble Breathing In *Pastor Joseph Johnson*

You are the air I breathe
 You are the wind beneath my wings
 You are my oxygen
 And when I'm falling
 It's you I'm falling in
 And I don't know what to do
 When the only reason I was breathing was you.

I'm having trouble breathing in
 I'm having trouble breathing in
 I'm having trouble breathing in
 I'm having trouble breathing in without you.

Jumping in that autumn lake
 The cold – it took my breath away
 You tell yourself breathe in and out
 You try to think about
 The thing you never have to think about
 And I don't know what to do
 When the only reason I was breathing was you.

I'm having trouble breathing in
 I'm having trouble breathing in
 I'm having trouble breathing in
 I'm having trouble breathing in without you.

I'm having trouble breathing in
 I'm having trouble breathing in
 I'm having trouble breathing in
 I'm having trouble breathing in without you.

On the day your body gets old and refuses to work
When you labor for just one more breath and your chest hurts
It's not because I'm leaving you – no, I'm right beside you
I promise I will never let you go
See – I can tell you something that you don't remember
There was another time when you struggled for just one breathe
And your whole body trembled - I will never forget it -
It's the day you were born - You weren't made to stay in the womb forever
And on that day – just like when you were brought naked into the light
I will breathe again into you the breath of a brand new life!

The breath of life I'm breathing in
The breath of life I'm breathing in
The breath of life I'm breathing in
The breath of life I'm breathing in, thanks to you.

The breath of life I'm breathing in
The breath of life I'm breathing in
The breath of life I'm breathing in
The breath of life I'm breathing in.

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