

10 November 2019
Pentecost 22

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Brothers and Sisters in Christ”

Text: Luke 20:27-40

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

As a pastor, I often get questions about what heaven is going to be like. What happens when we die? Where will we be? What will we be doing? Will I know everyone? Will my family still be my family? Lots of questions.

And the truth is, the Bible doesn't give us a lot of answers. We get glimpses, like we did last week on All Saints Day. No hunger, no thirst. No sin or death. God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Good stuff. But still, we'd like to know more.

But I think trying to teach us about our next life is a bit like trying to teach a baby in the womb what life in this world is going to be like for her. *She'll* be the same, mostly, inside the womb and out. And yet her life will be completely different, too. So, too, for us. You'll be the same person you are, but your life will be completely different. And yes, better.

The Sadducees we heard about today in the Holy Gospel ask Jesus a question like this - about what heaven is going to be like. And especially and specifically for this poor woman who, it seems, couldn't have children. What they're talking about in their question to Jesus is an Old Testament provision in the law called Levirate Marriage. It was established as a way to preserve the name and inheritance of a family. If a man died before having children, his brothers were supposed to care for his widow and try to provide an heir for his property.

Now, set aside the fact that this is not how we do things today and taking your brother's wife just sounds wrong. Things were different then. And especially when you lived in a land that had been given to you by God and carefully divided up - each tribe getting a specified area, and then each family within that tribe also getting a piece of the land. That land was important - it was a gift from God Himself. That land was your inheritance, and so an heir was needed. So, while you may get the heebie-jeebies about such a practice, you can understand the reason for it.

So, Jesus - what's heaven going to be like . . . when you have *this* kind of situation?

But sometimes, when I receive questions about heaven, the person doesn't really want an answer - the question is asked because they do not believe in a heaven or a life after this one. They want to be absurd and ask a question that cannot be answered and so prove that

they're right in their belief. They want to win the argument. Heaven is a hoax.

And so again with the Sadducees. They didn't like Jesus. Together with the Pharisees and the Scribes, they were constantly trying to discredit Jesus and trip Him up with their questions. And so it is here. The Sadducees weren't really interested in an answer because they didn't believe in the resurrection - that's the first thing. Couple that with the fact that the reason for Levirate Marriage had disappeared a long time ago - those tribal inheritances had long ago been wiped out in war and they were now living under the rule of Rome . . . and you get the picture. They weren't really looking for an answer! They're all proud of themselves for coming up with a question that will prove them right and embarrass Jesus - show Him to be the charlatan they know He is.

So, Jesus - what's heaven going to be like . . . how will *this* kind of situation be unraveled?

But as He showed before, Jesus is good at diffusing such bombs. Our trickiness is not nearly so tricky as we think. The answer is easy for Jesus: marriage, the procreation of children, inheritance rights, and your family name - all are of this world, not the next. The next is different. You'll be the same, mostly, but your life will be completely different. For the sin that caused childlessness, that caused death, that caused all kinds of sadness here, will be gone. And that woman and those seven brothers? They are all sons of God - that will be their **identity**. And all are sons of the resurrection - and so **inheritors** of heaven. Because you see, you Sadducees, there is, in fact, a resurrection and a life after this one. And after this world ends and your life here ends, He'll still be God and the God of the *living*. Those *still* living, even though they have been "birthed" from this life to the next.

And that is the birth that you and I are waiting for. The birth that we remembered with joy last week with our All Saints Day commemoration. The birth that we remember each of these last few weeks of the church year, as our focus turns to the end and Jesus' coming again in glory. And it's good to look to that day and look forward to that day - even if we don't know *exactly* what that day and new life will be like. Just as a new baby has lots of surprises once she is born into *this* world. And lots to learn. And it's so fun to watch children discover and learn new things and experience new joys! To see the looks on their faces . . .

Perhaps God will have that same joy when He gets to see the look on your face when you get there and see the life He has in store for you!

But now, of course, our children not only experience a lot of first joys, but a lot of first pains as well. Sin, death, evil, hurt, violence. And the look on their face . . . you can tell, it doesn't make sense to them. Why? Why did this happen? And they run to Mom or Dad for safety. . . . Until they get used to it. And it becomes just a part of life.

But it's not just a part of life - at least, not life as God intended it to be for us. It's an intrusion into life. An infection in our body. An invasion of evil into a world God created

good. An interruption of life by death. And none of it was meant to be. None of it had to be. But it is. Like it was for this poor woman we heard about today, who got passed around to seven brothers and still didn't have any children. And you probably know people like her. Probably not exactly in the same situation, but in desperate need of help. In desperate need of *hope*.

The help and hope Jesus has come to provide.

But the Sadducees couldn't see that because they kept trying to fit Jesus and His life and His side of eternity into their own box; into the way they thought of things. Like with this woman and marriage. How will what we see and know here fit what will be then and there? Answer: *it won't!* Because things will be different. Just as Jesus is different. Jesus, life come into a world of death to give it - to give us! - life again. To set things right in the forgiveness of sin.

For as strange as this world is to a newborn child, so is Jesus in our world. What we see. What we're used to. The sinless one in a sinful world. The one who loves perfectly in a world of imperfect love. The one who has come only to serve, not to be served, and to lay down His life for us on the cross. That by paying the price for your sin on the cross - *not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death* - sin no longer be at home in your body and have no place in your life. And that by His dying your death, your death be overcome, too.

For you've heard the saying: *You can have it if you can pry it from my cold, dead hand!* Well, that's what Jesus did! Jesus pried your life from death's cold hand when He rose from the dead. And that victory He achieved when He left death and the grave in His rear view mirror, He then gave to you when He baptized you. When you became a child of the living one, not the dead. A child of heaven. A child *already* re-born, born again, born from above, into a new life. A new life that you have now, and that will never end. Because now, in Jesus, when you die you will simply pass from life to life. From life in this world of sin and death, to life in a world with no sin or death. Only joy. Only perfection. Life the way your heavenly Father designed it for you.

Which means that even living now in a world filled with sin, disappointment, hurt, pain, suffering, death, and all kinds of evil, you have hope and help. You have a Father to run to! For while all these things can effect you, and certainly do, and will - life isn't easy! - they cannot overcome you. For you belong to the one who has overcome them. The one who has come for you and rescued you. The one who has given you His name and His inheritance, which will last forever.

And then, the help and hope you have thus received, you can now also give. To the likes of that poor woman we heard about today, or anyone else you know of like her. Who are in desperate need of help and hope. You have what they need! Not a strength or a quality or anything in you - **you have what they need for you have Jesus**. So give 'em Jesus! Give

them His love, His forgiveness, His mercy and care, and above all, His Word of promise and life.

For you see, when we keep heaven heaven and earth earth, we'll get it right. We'll see right. It's when we mix them up and get them confused that we get it wrong. When we try to make this life heaven on earth (as we thought about a little last week, when we thought about what it means to be blessed), or when we try to think of heaven in terms of earth (as the Sadducees did today), it doesn't work. And we just get more confused - about Jesus, about us, about what He is doing, and about what we should be doing. So better to keep the two distinct. That life here is not heaven on earth, and never will be; and life there is not earth in heaven. But the **life** we live here and now, on earth, in the struggle with sin and death, is the life we will live forever, when there is no more sin or death. And the feast we receive now, a foretaste of the feast we will receive forever. Jesus' feast. The feast of life.

And that woman the Sadducees asked about . . . in the resurrection, she will not have seven husbands but seven brothers in Christ. And she'll see her brothers named Moses, Abraham, Issac, and Jacob . . . and add your name to that list, too. For all who are children of God are brothers and sisters in Christ.

And if that's the case . . . maybe, just maybe we can see each other that way now, and live that way toward each other now. Sons of God in earthly vocations. And so that person in trouble, who is in need, who needs my help, who is struggling, who is dying . . . is not a stranger, not an enemy, and not an inconvenience - but my brother or sister in Christ. Even if they're not yet in Christ, who's to say they won't be? So maybe I can look at them that way now. And treat them that way now. And give 'em Jesus.

That is, after all, how Jesus sees us. And treats us. Giving us Himself. His life, His forgiveness, His Body and Blood. That we be His now. That we be His forever.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.