

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX
9 November 2025

Luke 20:27-38

The episode we have today in Luke takes place in Jerusalem. At 19:11 Luke reminds us that Jesus, and his group are near Jerusalem. The march that began at the end of chapter 9 is about to reach its destination. Then in 19:28, he enters the city in a triumphal way, like a king welcome by his loyal subjects. The crowds shout, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" After this glorious entrance, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem (9:41-44), cleanses the Temple (11:45-46); and begins daily episodes of teaching within the temple proper.

The first 26 verses of chapter 20 offer us a number of tests by those who seek to find something wrong with him, that they may accuse him of a crime and get him arrested and killed. There was a challenge by the chief priests and scribes about his authority (20:1-8), which he answers and then tells them the parable of the wicked tenants (20:9-19). There is a question by some spies from the local authorities about the legality of paying taxes to Caesar, which he answers brilliantly. Then, there is the challenge of the Sadducees we have today regarding marriage in the resurrection. The passage for today takes place withing a highly tense period of testing as Jesus' enemies are looking for a reason to kill him.

The passage tells us from the beginning that the question is a test. It is a question about the resurrection from a group known for "saying there is no resurrection." Ultimately, the questions that have preceded cover the religious sphere (by whose authority?), the political (is it lawful to pay takes to Caesar?) and the Mosaic Law sphere (the Torah). In fact, this group start their question by appealing to Moses. They say, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother." This command comes from Genesis 38:8 and Deuteronomy 25:5, which states, "If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son... the husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her." So, the question has merits according to the Torah.

The wrong answer to any of these three questions could be cause for arrest on religious, Jewish law, or Roman law grounds. In the first case, the accusation would be blasphemy, "This man claims to be the Son of God." In the second case, "This man is an enemy of the empire. He says we don't have to pay taxes to

Caesar.” And in the third case, a Levitical or Jewish law violation, “This man is in disagreement with Moses and, therefore, is a traitor to Judaism.” The brilliance of Jesus is that he answers truthfully, directly, convincingly, and smartly. In fact, chapter 20:19 says, “They were not able in the presence of the people to trap him by what he said, and being amazed by his answer they became silent.”

The case of the Sadducees is interesting. Seven brothers marry the same woman and die, leaving her childless. “Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be?” This question would have been simple to answer in Louisiana. Jesus would have asked, “Was any of the seven husbands a fan of LSU?” And finding one, the case would be settled. And if there were more than one spouse who bled purple and gold, then the answer would have been the typical Spanish formula, “Por que no los dos?” (Why not both?) Let them both be her husbands.

Jesus answered the question they asked and the question they didn’t ask. The first answer is simple: there is no marriage in heaven. People worthy of heaven are like angels, children of God and children of the resurrection. Earthly rules and institutions don’t apply to heaven. Besides, if there was marriage in heaven, very few of us would want to go! (just a joke, smile!) The point is that heaven operates by a different set of rules. God and God’s love and grace are the only source of authority in heaven. Once there, we will be forgiven and made worthy of being a child of God. Human institutions are unnecessary.

The second answer, what I called an answer to an un-asked question, requires some teaching. Jesus assumes these people have read the Law, since they have made a reference to Moses. It is for this reason that Jesus uses Moses himself to attack their lack of belief in the resurrection. He says, “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. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.” His answer is simple for those who know Scripture: Since the Lord is the God of these ancestors (not “was” but “is”) then these people must be alive somehow. And if they are alive, then there must be a resurrection.

Many in the West also doubt the resurrection. We have been trapped in a rationalistic, materialistic, and scientific trap. This trap tells us that if something doesn’t make rational sense then it is not real. If you cannot touch, feel, see, smell, or hear something then it doesn’t exist. If you cannot prove something scientifically, put it under the microscope, then it does not exist. But those of us who believe in Scripture know that there are layers of and levels of existence. We

believe in a creation that is yet to come, a new creation, when God will make all things new, and right all the wrongs of his creation. We believe in a spiritual world we can access through prayer, meditation, liturgy, and service. This is the realm of God in our lives, always with us as the paraclete, the one who comes along side us in our walk of faith. To us who have faith, this world is never out of reach. Those who have faith know you don't have to see or hear God's grace to know it is there, always near us. God is like the oxygen we breathe. We can't neither see it, nor hear it, touch it, taste it, or smell it. Yet, without it, we would die.

Paul stated clearly that without Christ's resurrection, our faith is futile and we are still in your sins, and those who have died are also lost (1 Corinthians 15:17-18). Many Christians, including some theologians, don't quite believe in this reality that awaits to be revealed. They accept Christianity as someone buys fire insurance, just in case. Some of them accept Christianity because of all the benefits offered by a life in community, the fellowship, the antidote to isolation. This is truth enough, but this cannot be the primary reason why we belong. I know many clubs and associations that can offer more fun and more benefits. Trust me, I belonged to a poker club in Louisiana for eleven years. There are places out there that can offer better fellowship. You should try them.

We come to church not just in case this mambo jumbo is true or because we throw the best parties. We come to church because we know this life is not all there is, there is a future waiting for us when our days are done, there is life beyond the horizon, and that glorious life begins even now. Remember that the kingdom is already here. We must find the foretaste of the heavenly banquet here in this present creation. We must exercise the rule of love now, in this world, so that we may be so well-practiced in the art of loving God and others with all our body, mind, and soul that it will feel natural in the new creation. Even now, God is in the process of creating life out of dark, inhospitable places. Even now, God is waking up his children to love and compassion. Even now, God is raising a new generation of kingdom builders who will reach across the divide and work for peace, justice, and reconciliation in this beautiful world God has given us to steward.

We also come to church because we were created in community to enjoy the benefits of community. Life is better together. We need the support and faith of our brothers and sisters to remain hopeful in a hopeless society, loving in a divided and angry world, and connected to God and others in a world where isolation and loneliness have become a worldwide health crisis. We need each other to become the people God created us to do. Our God is on the move, and nothing will thwart His plans for this creation. Blessings to you this morning, Amen!