

Sermon for Pentecost XXII Year C 2025
Children of the Resurrection

As usual, the religious elite are approaching Jesus with a trick question. They are hoping to catch him out against his own religious tradition so they tell him a parable-like story about a woman given in marriage to one of seven brothers.

When her husband dies without fathering an heir, she is passed on—according to the law of Moses—to his next younger brother.

And as each successive brother/husband dies without producing an heir, the Sadducees ask smugly, certain they have ensnared Jesus, “whose wife will she be?” in the resurrection.

The story is actually meant to be a joke that exposes the absurdity of believing in life after death.

How could resurrection ever work in practical terms, given the complexities of human life?

What would happen to marriage?

To lineages and family traditions?

To Old Testament law?

But as usual, Jesus just refuses to take the bait.

He tells the Sadducees that the entire premise of their question is wrong.

Their conception of God is too small.

The children of the resurrection, he tells them, will neither marry nor be given in marriage.

They will be like angels—that is heavenly beings beloved of God, for whom the rules and practices of earthly life will not apply.

To grasp resurrection via earthly terms is impossible;

it is a reality of another order entirely,
an order we can only approach by faith.

Like the Sadducees, we have questions . . . though perhaps not about the laws of Moses and women being married off to successive brothers.

But we are so wrong if we think that we are somehow the first generation of sophisticated folks to find life after death implausible.

We should think again.
The resurrection has never made sense in human terms.
The ancients struggled with it just as much as we do.
They found it just as odd, just as unlikely, just as bizarre.
In other words, there's nothing new under the sun.

The Sadducees in the Gospel story point out discrepancies
between resurrection and the laws of marriage and kinship.
Similarly, we point out discrepancies
between resurrection and the laws of biology and physics.
We find ourselves often baffled
at the Easter morning-of-it-all part of our faith.
Try as we might, we don't know how to wrap our brains around an
empty grave, a reanimated body—scars included—
a hope beyond the grim finality of death.

Perhaps we find this a relief to know that our struggle is an old struggle.
We aren't the first to wrestle with ultimate things
and we won't be the last.
Most importantly though, Jesus understands.
Please take note that his response to the Sadducees is not an angry one.
He doesn't scold; he challenges.
He invites them to stretch themselves.
To see anew, to see again.
What is more he uses their conviction that the only valid scriptures are
the first five books of Moses—called the Torah.
They had no use of the rest of the scriptures like the psalms or any of the
books of the prophets.
And so Jesus confines his answer in language of the Torah:
*And 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.*
Pretty clever that Jesus!

And just like that, Jesus asks them to think beyond entrenched categories of what's possible and impossible . . . because as we hear in the Gospel of Luke often, nothing is impossible with God.

When I read the gospels, I'm struck by how often the religious elite use the powerless and the marginalized to score points against Jesus.

(And that, too, is not confined to the distant past. Just saying!)

Take for instance the time a self-righteous men drag a terrified woman "caught in adultery" to Jesus and then dare him to let her off the hook in violation of the laws of Moses.

Or the time elite dinner guests berate a brokenhearted woman who anoints Jesus' feet with her tears.

Then there is the time the Pharisees criticize Jesus for eating with tax collectors and "sinners."

And in today's gospel, the concocted story about a vulnerable widow who is passed from one man to another like human chattel, just to trip Jesus up.

In each of these examples, the person in pain is expendable—at least in the eyes of the "elite."

In each example, human suffering is abstracted for the sake of argument, debate, and theological comeuppance.

Is it any wonder those on the edges flock to Jesus while the privileged find him intolerable?

Resurrection means living in circumstances that should render living impossible.

Resurrection means enduring, overcoming, persisting, and surviving.

What do the privileged know about such robust and resilient living?

Maybe resurrection only makes sense to those who desperately need it.

Maybe the hope of justice, peace, rest, and consolation after death only resonates for those whose lives on earth are marred by injustice, anxiety, toil and trauma.

The children of the resurrection know that questions about Jesus are not in the end academic questions.

They are questions of life and death.

They are questions with stakes so high, so consequential, and so profound, we dare not abstract them.

Imagine the woman of this proposed story finally in a place where her worth and her belovedness don't depend

on her husband, her fertility, or her sex appeal.

Imagine her basking in the safe, unconditional, and eternal love of the God who created her.

You see, if our questions and objections about faith require us to invalidate the lived experiences of actual people who are suffering in this life,

then we are asking the wrong questions and favoring the wrong objections.

The children of the resurrection are children of love. Full stop.

The other problem with approaching Jesus as the Sadducees do is that their approach isn't personal or intimate.

They want to know Jesus without walking with Jesus.

But we will only know Jesus if we walk with him.

They want to witness resurrection without suffering death.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus makes clear that only those willing to take up their own crosses and follow him can experience new life.

Only disciples will become children of the resurrection.

The life of faith is not a spectator sport—

To know it, we have to walk it.

It requires risking intimacy with Jesus.

We'll need to share in his life as it is incarnated within Christian community, taking up the practices of God's people.

Then we enter into the joy, the loss, the sacrifice, the wonder, the mystery, the grief, and the challenge of life in Christ.

Resurrection knowing is a *lived* knowing.

But do we want this kind of kingdom or not?
Jesus describes a kingdom where no human being “belongs” to any other because all belong equally to God.
I have asked all of us in many other sermons, do we mean it when we pray *thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*?
If we do, then we need to stand against any kind of Christian elitism that urges and supports discrimination against women, against the LGBTQ community, against the poor, and urges and practices oppression upon immigrants or people of color. It’s more than two thousand years after Jesus described a realm of radical freedom, radical love and radical equality, how can the church continue to support patriarchy and fear-filled views on sex, gender, race and sexual orientation?
Jesus’ description of the kingdom of God is clear.
So do we want God’s kingdom or don’t we?

*Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living,
for to him all of them are alive.*

We serve the God the living.

What does this mean?

Well . . . as we have been hearing over the last few weeks, I believe it means that God is always in the business of making new, making alive, making vibrant.

It means we do well to stop clinging to what is dead, what is deadening and what is passing away.

It means God is among us to bring new life, to risk evolution, metanoia, growth and change.

Or are we too pedantic or just don’t want to change?

As we sing Job’s words of faith—*I know that my redeemer lives*—let them be words to live and love by every day.
Then we will show ourselves to be children of the resurrection.