

**DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES**

The United Methodist Church

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TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR C

The gospel writers love these stories—stories where Jesus gets the better of those who seek to outsmart him appear in all the gospels. But a key to the stories is that Jesus always engages.

REFERENCES

Haggai 1:15b-2:9

Psalm 145:1-5, 17-21

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17

Luke 20:27-38

COLORS

Green

Tread carefully, preacher. Especially in a lighthearted or playful mode. Our task here is not to humiliate the Sadducees, even though they wanted to humiliate Jesus. Whenever we look at another faith system and the internal variations and conflicts, we can run the risk of demeaning that which we do not understand or with which we do not participate. We are not here to belittle; we are not here to claim moral or religious superiority over another. Our task here, as it is whenever we dare to preach, is to experience Jesus again and to see ourselves more clearly as we are on the way to being made into disciples of Jesus Christ.

We do, however, need some understanding of the beliefs of the Sadducees to understand what is going on here. Luke tells us that the Sadducees do not believe in the Resurrection. But he does not tell us that the Sadducees were the

well-to-do folk in the community. It makes sense if you think about it. When you have all that this world has to offer, why bother with something beyond it? When you can claim that being rich is a sign of God's favor and blessing on your life, then why not go all-in on that. Oh, they had a sense of eternity, but it was in their legacy and in their children. Your name survives you—that's what you were working for.

It's not hard to find this sort of thinking around us today. There are those who consider their wealth to be a sign of God's blessing and who live to ensure their legacy in this world. But perhaps what is most recognizable to us is the approach used to challenge different ways of thinking. They don't show up to discuss Jesus' stance on the Resurrection from the dead or what shape the kingdom of heaven will take – in this world and the next. No, they come to make fun, ridicule, or satirize the very idea that anyone would hold an opposing view to theirs.

Jesus had just gone a round or two with the lawyers and priests who wanted to talk to him about tax policy in the empire. Now he is faced with a contingent of Sadducees, who just parked their fancy cars and strolled up in their tailored suits and proceeded to concoct a wild scenario designed to make belief in eternity look ridiculous. They weren't looking for an answer: they were convinced there was no answer. Their only goal was to humiliate their opponent. "So, Jesus, one bride, seven brothers, who owns her in eternity?"

Then Jesus did that thing he always seems to do in the Gospels. He takes them seriously. No, really. He approaches the conversation as if it were a real question looking for a real solution to a complicated, if not impossible problem. He addressed them as if they were open to learning something.

The first thing he wants them to learn is that people aren't property in eternity. He'd like them to learn that people aren't property anywhere, but a step at a time, it seems. Wait, you're thinking, who said anything about property? Well, that was what was behind the question, property and legacy. Who gets to live on? Who has a name in this imaginary heaven, they are wondering? But Jesus says there is no giving away, there is no marriage, because they are children of God, children of the Resurrection, and therefore they don't exist to produce

children. Something changes in the Resurrection, says Jesus, something you just barely understand.

Having responded to their sarcasm, Jesus then does something else that he often does in these conversations – he answers the question they should have asked. Had they decided to enter into this conversation by asking what basis was there for believing in the Resurrection from the dead, it would have been a very different moment. Had they set aside their snark and their disdain long enough to ask and to listen, we might have had a very different model for how differences of theological opinion could be handled.

And what was the question Jesus wanted them to ask? He wanted to meet them on their own ground. The other thing about the Sadducees is that they saw only the books of Moses, the Torah, as scripture. Only Moses is authoritative for the Sadducees. So, Jesus turns to Moses. “And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed” (v.37). Uh oh. Now what? Where do you go from there? When he takes your hero and shows him to be on the opposite side of the argument, it’s hard to come up with a witty and withering reply.

We don’t have a response at this point. Oh, read another verse, and you’ll see that someone replies. The scribes, teachers of the law, who wet their fingers and drew a line in the air. “Score one for Jesus,” they say. The enemy of my enemy, you know. But the Sadducees don’t respond. At least Luke doesn’t give them space to respond. There probably was a response. A loud and negative one. Sure, they had read that verse before, but it doesn’t mean what Jesus says it means. No way. Could it? Surely not. But what if . . . ? Jesus saw his mission as planting seeds. That’s why he used those images so often to describe the kingdom. A seed takes a while to grow. An idea takes a while to set up residence in the consciousness of a believer. Did he change their minds with that little altercation? It’s hard to know for sure, but maybe a seed was planted. Maybe a mind was opened to a new way of seeing the world and the creator of all that is.

Or maybe it was puzzles within puzzles. This group came to Jesus with a riddle, a test to check his orthodoxy as they defined it anyway. And Jesus riddled them right back. Maybe there is a lesson there for us. Meet folks where they are, speak in their language, and then let the Spirit work. After all, we’ve got an eternity to work with.