

Luke 20: 27-38**Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost, Year C****November 9, 2025****The Rev. Katherine Bush**

Let me tell you everything that I know for sure about the afterlife ...

I can start to tell you everything I know for sure about this world. Of course, even that will only be based on my vantage point and experiences. And this is the problem, right? How much I know about this world I walk around in every day is limited by where and how I walk around, and I've certainly never walked around heaven. I'm not even sure if we walk around in heaven? And yet, we humans take what we know about this realm and apply it to the next. This is why we say things like "he's up there playing golf with St. Peter." Or we go the opposite direction, as in Paul Simon's song "The Afterlife," with its chorus, "you got to fill out the form first, and then you wait in the line." As if the kingdom of heaven is most like the DMV. Bless our hearts, and our pitiful imaginations.

And God bless the hearts of those Sadducees, who just like us, are looking around at their world and assuming that if there is a resurrection (which they doubt), but if there is a resurrection, it will look a lot like the world they're familiar with. And the world they're familiar with is just as broken as ours is today.

To understand the setup for their question, it's helpful to understand that they've come up with some complicated workarounds to deal with their particular broken systems. For starters, they live in a world in which women have no status and little to no power. And that produces another problem because once you've created a category of people who cannot own property, or inherit, or control their own resources, that means you need a way to catch that category of people when they aren't tethered to a husband or father or son. Thus, this strange-to-us practice of Levirate marriage, passing a widow off like a potato to the next available brother. It's a safety net in a way, though one that still treats women as property - a field or some livestock to be taken on by the next of kin. But, I digress, kind of - we'll come back to those broken systems in a bit.

The actual point the Sadducees are trying to make is that resurrection life is an absurd possibility, and they've come up with an absurd situation to make their point. It's fair to assume that they're not taking any of this seriously, nor are they actually curious about the kingdom to come; they're primarily interested in catching Jesus with a 'gotcha' question to demonstrate to the crowds that he is a fraud. But this question doesn't trap Jesus; it gives him another opportunity to try to expand the imaginations of anyone listening, Sadducees or not. Jesus understands that all we can do is look around our earthly, mortal existence and transfer it into a mysterious future. Even when what we see is such an obviously faulty, fallen, broken world; we still want to lay these known images over the unknown. That's what we can do, but what he can do is try to pull back the curtain on the most unknown of unknowns.

In this broken world, we need particular systems to hold the fractured pieces together, but in "that age and in the resurrection," things will be so incomprehensibly different, starting with the idea that there will be no fractures. You won't be scared of suffering or death anymore,

so you won't have to let the fear drive your daily decisions. How decidedly different would that life be, to live fearlessly? And you will be children of God, not property, no matter what this world tries to tell you. Many of us have been told that we are children of God in this world, but there we will know it without any shadow of doubt; we will finally be confident in our truest identity. And again, how decidedly different would it be to understand our deepest identities without any wavering?

Can our little imaginations encompass these truths about the age to come?

To imagine a time when we will not be driven by fear and anxiety, nor by scarcity. To recognize ourselves and everyone else as daughters and sons of God who have only that identity, not wife or worker or wannabe. Jesus knows it's hard for us. And he may be frustrated with our gotcha questions and our posturing, but it seems he has infinite patience for reminding us that we could live differently. And not just in the age to come. This is key.

People show up with their esoteric questions, akin to asking how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. And Jesus answers, not to do the math but to reveal the better question. In answering their technical question about the afterlife, he is also, always pointing us back to this very life. Because this life is where we are now, and wouldn't it be extraordinary if we could flip the script around, so that instead of projecting qualities of this broken world onto the next, we could instead take the hints we get about the wholeness that awaits us and get about the business of living that way now and here?

Because Jesus was very interested, dare I say more interested, in bringing the kingdom near to us, and not so fascinated by our fixation on the next one. Time and time again, his stories point to this everyday world of ours and how God is showing up in it, this one. He seems determined to show us a horizon, not in the sky, but a horizon we can reach and cross over while we're still here. So here is a better question:

Teacher, what would it be like to live without fear of death or suffering, without the constant second-guessing of our status? What would it be like to walk around this world, broken as it is, and live with a sense of wholeness, with a whole and complete grasp of the unshakeable love of God for each of us? These are the important questions, friends, and not at all absurd. Jesus came to reveal a better way to live here, rather than spending time musing about whether the streets are paved with gold somewhere else.

Even when presented with calculated queries about the next life, we are nudged toward a new understanding of this life. And this is why Levirate marriage and Sadducees are still strangely relevant. Just like always, we have our complicated workarounds to make up for all the twisted ways we see each other, all the warped ways we have built our lives. We humans, a few thousand years ago and today, look around at our world and struggle to imagine that things could be much different or better - even in the age to come. Our lackluster vision keeps us from asking the important questions; instead, we drum up arcane situations and try to undermine the very hope that might lead us into new life.

But what brokenness are we accepting around here, calling it good enough?

What habits and conventions are we building our lives around, only merely trying to shore up the debris of this broken world? And what might it be like to have someone come along and say, you sweet and silly mortals, bless your hearts; so much more awaits you. And not just awaiting you in the next realm, but in this one, if only you'd stop harping on the number of husbands she has and instead bring a little of this kingdom imagination to bear on your life.

Turns out we don't actually have to know all that much about the details of the afterlife to live this life. If only we could remember that you and I have nothing to fear and that we are indeed sons and daughters of God. If only we could see that we live this life in the beautiful light of the resurrection.