



Sunday, November 9, 2025  
Luke 20:27-38 (Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost)

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Tony Acompañado

Throughout the Gospels it's common to find different groups of people who are offended by Jesus' teachings trying to catch him in his words in order to discredit him and get him in trouble. However, time after time what we find is Jesus avoiding their traps by offering otherworldly answers that immediately silence his skeptics.

And today's Gospel reading from Luke is just such an example. Some Sadducees come up to Jesus and try to trap him with a logical problem about belief in the resurrection of the dead. At first, Jesus' response seems to come across as one given without much thought, and maybe even a little silly. But a closer look reveals Jesus once again turning their understanding and ours completely upside down.

A little set up here might be helpful. We're getting towards the end of Jesus' earthly life. He's arrived in Jerusalem, and the religious authorities are trying to get him to say something that will get him in trouble with either the people or the Romans.

The Sadducees, the religious party at the center of this story, were generally upper class, and promoted peace with Rome in order to keep the Temple intact and free from outside interference. Their religious convictions were focused on the ceremonial aspects of the Law, and they only considered the Torah (*the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*) to be Holy Scripture.

They resisted any kind of theological speculation. And any hope they had for a messiah was centered around a great high priest who would renew Israel's worship life, rather than a king who would free Israel from its enemies.

Here, a group of Sadducees attempt to catch Jesus in what they considered to be an unbiblical belief in the resurrection of the dead, and they do this by asking him a question around levirate marriage. Levirate marriage worked like this – if a married man died without children, under the Law, his younger brothers would be required to marry the deceased brother's widow. This custom aims to continue the deceased husband's family line and inheritance. In Latin, levirate means “husbands brother.”

The hypothetical story they use is 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?

As the Sadducees saw it, this law caused an impossible problem for belief in the resurrection. In a case where there were, say, seven brothers who married the same woman, one after the other, whose wife would she be in the resurrection?

But Jesus as usual refuses to fall into their trap. He tells the Sadducees that the entire premise of their question is wrong. That their understanding of God is too small. To grasp resurrection in earthly terms is impossible, because the reality is, it's something altogether different – something we can only understand by faith.

The basic point Jesus is making is that marriage is a strategy for *this* world, not for the world to come. None of the brothers would be her husband because there won't be such thing as husbands and wives at all.

And then he throws in a twist with a connection back to the book of Exodus and he turns this into a statement on the relationship between God and life. This is a mic drop moment for Jesus, and yet it's understandable why they, and many of us, may have missed it. Because we're simply less than impressed by Jesus' answer. They



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asked him a question about marriage and Jesus responds by saying marriage is irrelevant – but he never actually says *why*.

It seems that the logic Jesus is arguing is that marriage is inherently a human strategy for dealing with the problem of death.

Without any thought of an eternal life, our lives are going to be pathetically short, and the only way to have any sense of *living on* is in securing one's line of descendants. Levirate marriage is a strategy for doing exactly this. So if we think of it in these terms, then the Sadducees argument against the resurrection makes perfect sense.

But Jesus blows up their argument by turning the whole thing on its head. There's no need for strategies to deal with mortality in the Kingdom of God because death is meaningless to God. God is *The Living God*, the *God of the Living*, and the *God of Life*. *Where God is there is life*.

Note that his response to the Sadducees though is not an angry one. He doesn't scold; he challenges. He invites them to stretch themselves. To take another look, to see differently. He asks them to think beyond their entrenched ideas of what's possible and impossible, because nothing is impossible with God.

And with this in mind then, Jesus' answer to the Sadducees isn't saying that their argument against the resurrection is wrong because they misunderstand marriage – it's wrong because they misunderstand the nature of life itself. With God, life, not death, is the default. Life is everything. Where God is, there is life. Where there is life, God is at work.

The line Jesus uses to conclude his response to the Sadducees is, "*Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living, for to him all of them are alive.*" What does this mean?

Perhaps it means that God is always in the business of making new, and making vibrant, and making alive. Perhaps it means we need to stop clinging to what's dead or passing away. Perhaps it means we need to risk transformation, growth, and change.

It's precisely what I see happening here at Ascension, but I think Scott said it best in his faith witness earlier, "*what about your Ascension story?*" And then an invitation to join us in celebrating this chapter then writing the next and beyond.

So my friends, what new thing does God want to do among us that we're too afraid to let God do? Where are we stagnating? Can we rise up out of our graves? Can we hold out for the impossible? And can we dare to live as Jesus longs for us to live?

Thanks be to God. Amen.