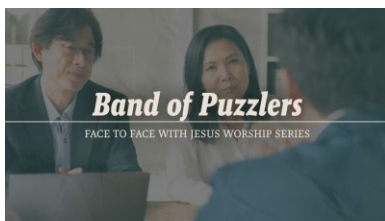


Luke 20:27-40

²⁷ Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him ²⁸ and asked him a question, “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. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers; the first married and died childless; ³⁰ then the second ³¹ and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. ³² Finally the woman also died. ³³ In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.”

³⁴ Jesus said to them, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; ³⁵ but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. ³⁶ Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. ³⁷ 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. ³⁸ Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive. ³⁹ Then some of the scribes answered, “Teacher, you have spoken well.” ⁴⁰ For they no longer dared to ask him another question.



Today we have a type of story that is very popular with the gospel writers. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all liked to tell stories where Jesus gets the better of those who seek to trap or outsmart or embarrass him. Jesus certainly could have dismissed or ignored these sarcastic, sanctimonious, self-centered religious leaders. But he never did.

Jesus took on all comers, eager to engage them, eager to try and pry open their minds and their understanding of God just a little bit more. Just as he had for himself, Jesus has high standards for all religious leaders. We too should be willing to engage, even invite, others in conversations of faith. This too is our call. It should be our greatest desire to help others to come to know and understand Jesus and what it means to live a life of faith. We were all lost once. We all get lost now and again. Because of that, we too are on a journey of faith. We too continue to learn and grow in our discipleship of Jesus. Today, on All Saints Sunday here at Grace, let us remember and let us be thankful for those saints who have helped us on our journeys of faith. As we prepare to do so, let us pray...

Lord God, we are all works in progress. We are all in need of your grace and of the Holy Spirit's leading and guiding in our lives. Open us up to your word today as we consider the call to engage one and all, modeling our lives after the Christ. Just as God came in the flesh to reveal the depth of that unconditional love for us, let us seek to better understand and engage those who need to know that love. In this spirit, Lord, I ask that the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts would be acceptable in your sight, O God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The Sadducees that approach Jesus in today's gospel lesson were not unlike many in our world today. You may know one or two of them. Maybe you stray into being one of them now and then. At times I can get a little lost and think that the great thing or event that happened was because of my doing or that the sense of security that I trust in because of all that I have done. There are many who think that because they have all that the world has to offer, why do they need to bother with something beyond this world?

Back in Jesus' day those who were wealthy claimed that being rich was because of God's favor and blessing on their lives. The Sadducees went all-in on this belief. Accordingly, they had no belief in the afterlife or in the resurrection. They hoped their legacy was to be remembered as highly religious men and for their children carrying on the family name. This represented their sense of eternity. As long as your name and your reputation survived you, well, that was all that mattered concerning the future. It is not hard to find this type of thinking today. There are lots of people who live in the here and now with no concern for things eternal. Within this group there are plenty who have a disdain for Christianity and there are others who will make fun of or ridicule or become sarcastic because we hold a view that is different from their world view.

In order to better understand the Sadducees and where they came from as they entered today's interaction with Jesus, I invite you to turn your attention to the screens. We will be watching a video entitled "Beyond the Applause." It features Wayne Huizenga, Jr., a very wealthy and powerful man from south Florida. Please turn your attention to the screens.

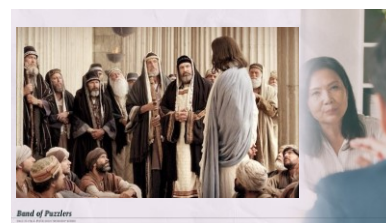
[Play the video "I Am Second".]



Wayne is not unlike others who are wealthy and/or powerful. Their status leads them to become self-centered and they live like there is no God. They think that they have everything that they need. Then there is no need for God. And people who were once faithful can also fall away from the faith as their lives become centered on the things of this world.

This was partly true for the Sadducees. While they strived to keep the law of Moses, they were also very well-to-do. Their faith was strict and limited. They held only to the Torah – the first five books of our Old Testament. These were the books attributed to Moses. That is why verse 37 in our Luke 20 scripture is so important. More on that later!

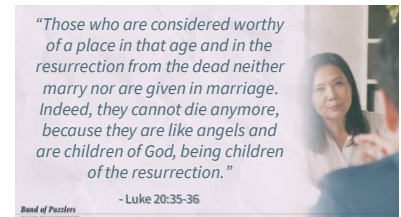
Because Sadducees had all that the world had to offer, they lived only for the present. When they come to ask Jesus a riddle, they believe that there is no answer to the riddle. Jesus has just finished dancing with the lawyers and priests who wanted to talk with him about paying taxes to Caesar. Fresh off that encounter, the Sadducees roll up, dressed in finely tailored robes. They concoct a wild scenario about seven different brothers marrying the same wife, one after another, none having a child with her. Children were important in that time. They were needed. They were labor. That is why one brother after another was obliged to marry the woman – to produce offspring, to leave an heir for their brother, to provide needed laborers.



Again, they were not looking for an answer. They did not think there was one. Their goal was to humiliate their opponent, to ridicule and to make fun of Jesus and his beliefs. They say, “So, Jesus – one bride, seven brothers, no children. Who owns this woman in eternity?” To own another seems odd, doesn’t it? But that was the culture of the day. Women were clearly second class to men, usually with little to no rights. Children fell a step further down the ladder of power and authority. Property and legacy – that was really what was behind this question from the Sadducees. Who gets to live on, Jesus? Who has a name carried on in your imaginary heaven?

To consider eternity is a pretty natural thing, isn't it? Even for those who do not believe in God, they wonder what is next, if anything. The hard-core atheist, for them, the last breath is simply the end. But for most people, there is a curiosity about eternity. Most of us wonder about heaven, about what will come next. We would like an answer to this question.

Even though the Sadducees did not want an answer or even thought there was an answer, Jesus takes them seriously. He enters the conversation as if there were a real answer to this complicated and convoluted question. Jesus addresses them as if they were open to learning, as if they asked a question seeking to gain understanding. Jesus begins by acknowledging the scenario they created. Yes, he says, *"Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage."* That is part of this life. But in the life to come, Jesus tells them, things are different. In verses 35 and 36 Jesus informs them that *"those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection."* There is no giving away or taking, no owning, no marriage in heaven. There is no need to produce children. It is so because in the resurrection all are children of God. Something changes in the resurrection. But as it is something that they do not even begin to understand, Jesus stops here and shifts gears.

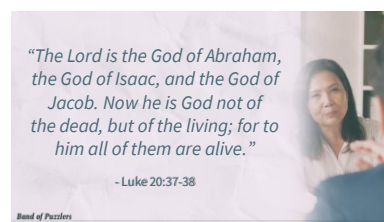


Jesus turns to this band of puzzlers, shifts gears and answers the question that they really should have asked.

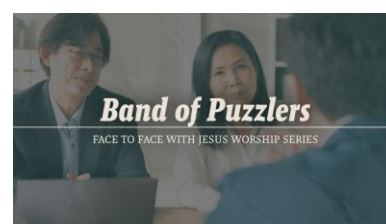
Before we press on into that, though, a quick question for us: how many of you have asked God a question or offered up a prayer request, only to have God answer in a way that was right but did not really match what you asked?

Plenty of times I have prayed for this or that, thinking that was what was needed or what should be done. And then God had a whole other plan. Answering the prayer that I should have prayed, I've found that God's plan or idea or solution is always better than mine. Jesus comes by this trait naturally.

Turning to the one who held all authority for the Sadducees, Jesus brings Moses into the discussion. Looking back to the story of the burning bush found in Exodus 3, Jesus reminds these uppity religious men that Moses spoke of the dead rising. Answering the question that really matters – is there a resurrection? – Jesus reminds them that God told Moses that *“The Lord is 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.”* Fellas, Moses himself showed that the dead are raised. The one you say holds all authority speaks of rising from the dead. Uh-oh. Jesus takes their hero Moses and shows him to be one who holds an eternal view that is opposite to their world view. Uh-oh.



What happens to us and to our faith when we learn something new that brings into question a previously held belief or thought or understanding? What does it feel like when we become puzzled? We suddenly feel a sense of discomfort or disorientation.



What we long held true is now in doubt. Well, here we have two options. One is to refuse this new information, this new way of understanding. And then we stay stuck in our belief. The other choice is to open ourselves up, to consider this new thing, to ponder this new thing, to wrestle with this new thing. I hope that this second choice was the choice of the Sadducees.

I hope that this second choice is my choice when my faith comes to a point of questioning. We do not know where this conversation led the Sadducees. We don't know their response. But we do know that Jesus planted some seeds. That was his mission – to plant seeds. Seeds, you know, take time to grow.

We do know, however, the response of those who hung around after Jesus answered their questions about paying taxes to Caesar. The lawyers and priests, they were on the opposite side of the resurrection debate from the Sadducees. So they wet a finger, hold it up in the air and say, *“Teacher, you have spoken well.”* Score one for Jesus! They are pleased that Jesus, one they oppose, has struck a blow against the other religious leaders that they oppose.

Returning to the idea of planting seeds, Jesus cast out these seeds in hope that they would sit in the Sadducees' soil, slowly taking root, slowly beginning to work their way up towards the surface. It can take a while for a seed to bear fruit. While it is unlikely that the seed planted by referring to Moses would bear fruit right away, maybe a mind or two was at least partially opened to think of the heaven-earth reality in a new way. I think this idea of planting seeds in hope that they one day grow to produce fruit is a call that we all have.

When we encounter someone who might have a question about faith – whether authentic or bating, whether truly seeking or seeking to entrap – how do we respond in a way that seeks to engage and draw in, that seeks to welcome conversation instead of propagating argument or ridicule? I believe that we do this just as Jesus did, first meeting the person or persons right where they are at. And then we seek to get down to the real question being asked, to the root of their inquiry.

Jesus met Sadducees where they were at – just as Jesus met Wayne Huizenga, Jr., just as Jesus met me and you, just as Jesus seeks to meet all people. Meeting them and us there, right where we're at, Jesus then sought to love them there as he engaged their questions. He didn't fight back. Jesus didn't tell them they were wrong. He didn't tell them that only he was right. Remember, Jesus used Moses' example to plant a seed of truth, to give an invitation to think and perhaps to live differently, to believe differently.

That's that message that God gives through Haggai the prophet in the Old Testament. In this short book, God admits that the new temple isn't the same as old. It is not as grand, not as beautiful. In the video we saw that as a changed man, Wayne wasn't any poorer. All the wealth just had less allure. In the book of Haggai, God was telling the people that the building didn't matter. The same remains true today. The building, this building, as wonderful as it is, well, it doesn't matter. This is a nice building and all, but God is not the building. The bottom line, according to the prophet, is that God was always right there with the faithful.

God was right there with the Jews in Haggai's day, encouraging them. God was right there with the band of puzzlers as they tried to humiliate God in the flesh.

God was also right there in south Florida with the faithless billionaire, opening his eyes to see the way, the truth, and the life. God was right there with me in Connecticut when I chose Jesus as Lord and Savior, just as God was right there wherever and whenever it was that you came to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Jesus wants to be right there with all who are lost, engaging in conversation, answering questions, seeking to build understanding. My friends, Christ calls us to be there in his place, welcoming all into the love of God in Christ. May we respond to the call each time that God presents us with an opportunity to share the good news. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. How do you imagine the seeds planted in the Sadducees growing and taking root? In whose life could you do something similar this week?
- 2) *Pray*. When has God answered a prayer God's way instead of your way? How can you be more open in your prayer life to allowing this to happen more often?
- 3) *Study*. Read Luke 20:41-48. How is Jesus doing to the scribes what he did to the Sadducees in this week's reading? Where might Jesus be doing this in your life?