

Sermon – Luke 20:27-38
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“A Resurrection Revolution”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. I've spent my entire life believing – more or less, most of the time – that this life is not all there is. As a child, I learned to call this other place (time? thing?) heaven, and my spiritual imagination has been filling it up ever since. My grandparents are there, and so is Fluffy, my childhood dog. It's a place where the Royals win the pennant every year and the *Star Wars* prequels were never made. And it's a place where I'll get to spend eternity with Erika, my beloved. To be fair, I'm not sure that “heaven” is the word that Erika would use to describe an eternity spent with me, but that's another story for another sermon. When I think about heaven, my mind wanders to what is best about my life, thinking that heaven will be even more of these things for even more time. You might say my heaven is tremendously “Dave-centric,” and I bet yours is, too. Well, maybe not “Dave-centric” for you. No, I mean that your heaven is probably focused on your wishes and dreams, your desire to have the best parts of your life go on forever. But what if your life isn't made up of best parts, if the decidedly unheavenly pieces of your existence block out the good? What of this life's broken relationships? Is the next life just more of this life? If it is, one would be forgiven for wondering what the fuss is all about.
2. Of course, there are those who just don't believe in such things. Take, for example, the Sadducees. They didn't believe in a world other than this one, or in life after death. Specifically, they didn't believe in the possibility of a

resurrection from the dead. In part, this was because they were Torah-literalists, and the first five books of Hebrew scripture do not appear to speak of resurrection. The real reason, however, is that the Sadducees didn't need resurrection. Not because this life was so full of pain that they didn't want more of it, but because this life was so good that this life was enough. The Sadducees were the political, religious, and economic elite of occupied Judea. A little corruption here, a little cooperation with the enemy there, sprinkle in some tax collecting; these guys had it made. They didn't need another world; they were all set in this one.

3. So it is that, during the last week of Jesus' life, the Sadducees take their turn debating Jesus. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees, the Sadducees are not debating finer points of theology with Jesus, nor are they trying to trap him. Really, the Sadducees are just making fun of Jesus. "Oh, you believe in the resurrection from the dead, buddy? Well, try this one on for size: A woman was married seven times. And in this bride-for-seven-brothers scenario, each guy died. One after the other. And she, poor thing, never had kids. Then – get this – *she* died, too. Tell us, Jesus, which one is her heavenly husband?" The Sadducees produce a fictional farce with which to skewer Jesus and the other resurrectionists – their little case study proves how silly it is to think about resurrection, or any other sort of life after death. After all, they think, if there's another life, it must be conditioned on this one – and what sort of second life could this sad woman hope to experience?
4. Jesus, however, isn't having it. Where they see a make-believe woman whose story undermines hope for another life, Jesus sees all the other all-too-real sufferers for whom this life has not provided enough good, for whom the promise of another world sounded even better than milk and honey did to their ancestors. This woman was fictional, a joke, but her story was both real and not particularly humorous. The Sadducees, with the smugness exhibited by the well-to-do of all times and places, start by mocking her grief. The story

begins with her mourning the death of her beloved. And because he died childless, she has to marry the man's brother. And so on. Why? It was a practice known as levirate marriage. A woman, you see, only had value in relation to husband and children. A childless widow had neither, so there had to be some sort of social safety net. If the deceased man had a brother, he would marry her so that they could have children to carry on the first husband's name. So yes, there was a bit of a safety net here for the woman, but it was safety net within a broken system left unquestioned, a system that insisted she only had value through a husband or children.

5. Jesus doesn't take the bait. He doesn't say which husband will be hers in heaven. No. He declares that in heaven people won't marry or be given in marriage. Note that he doesn't comment as to whether or not earthly relationships continue. He simply says people will no longer be given in marriage. In this life, this woman was nothing more in the eyes of others than a pawn on an oppressive chessboard, moved around to give value to others. And so she is given from one to the next. But no more. The resurrection undoes this, for in the life of the resurrection she will not be anyone else's to give away. She will be herself, the person she was meant to be, simply because God loves her. Because she is, in the words of the psalmist, the apple of God's eye. She doesn't need a husband or a child to make her such.
6. Resurrection is not simply this life but more of it. Resurrection isn't an eternal repetition of our lives' greatest hits, nor is it the unending endurance of this world's suffering. Resurrection isn't just more. Resurrection is revolution. It is the undoing, the overturning, of this world's sorrow and sadness. It's what Mary sang about while Jesus grew in her womb all those years ago – the lowly lifted and the mighty cast down, aside. Widows raised up, scornful Sadducees sent down. Resurrection is what Jesus came to do. Jesus, the eternal Word of God, the One who didn't have to worry about everlasting life because he *is* everlasting life, deigned to become one of us. He

came alongside this woman and every other punchline to every other joke made by the rich and powerful; he came alongside them to be mocked with them. Behold, king of the Jews, they cried! He saved others, let him save himself! But he, the Word, never said a mumblin' word. He just died. Like we will. He had come, however, to play one last hand in the great game against sin and oppression, against evil and death. He, the preacher of resurrection, put his money where his mouth was, and he died. For you and for me. And then, wonder of wonders, he was raised from the dead. In the plain meaning of the word, he stood up again and he lived. The joke was on death all along.

7. In the resurrection of Jesus, we don't see and receive a bland promise of *more* life; we are gifted with *new* life. It's a life in which the rich and powerful of this world are cast down; still in the Kingdom, perhaps, but certainly not running the show anymore.. And the nameless, the loveless, the homeless? Well, their lives don't just go on; their lives are resurrected as something new. Those who were given away, taken away, who wasted away? They are reborn in Jesus, the first fruits of the resurrection, the One who was raised to show us that not only is this life not all there is, but that because we will be raised, we can join the resurrection revolution now. After all, if there really is a woman whose been widowed seven times, the last thing we should be doing is using her as a jumping off point for theological speculation. *That*, after all, never saved anyone. So how about this? Whatever the next world looks like, and however our relationships carry over, trust it to God. I hope – I believe – that my relationships with spouse, kids, and all those I love will carry over. But that's in God's hands, as are all the saints. But what do I know? In faith, I know what Job knew: my Redeemer lives. In faith, I know what Moses heard: God is – not was, but is – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In faith I know that I will be raised. And I certainly know that the Kingdom isn't about me; it's Jesus-centric, focused entirely on the Lamb of God. So maybe instead of wondering and worrying about how the next life will be shaped by this one, I can get on with the revolutionary business of

letting the resurrection life of the world to come shape my life in this world today. I know that in Christ I shall be raised. I *know* it. Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. For me, and for you. Christ is turning the world around. Let's stand up and join in. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.