



We can Only Imagine

The Rev. Liz Williams

Proper 27 Year C, Luke 20:27-38

The Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost, November 10, 2019

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

Our gospel lesson today raises many questions.

What is resurrection like?

How will our resurrected life be like our life on earth?

What will our relationships be?

What would we like it to be?

What does the church say about resurrection?

and so many more.

We might not be able to answer all of the questions we have, however, we can look at the scripture and our Book of Common Prayer and see if there is some wisdom for us.

The gospel today follows Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." And Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. Jesus entering the temple and emptying it of those who are selling things there. Luke reminds us that "everyday Jesus was teaching in the temple. . . the people spellbound by what they heard."

And along come the Sadducees. An elite class whose power came from operating the temple. They felt that resurrection, the continuation of life after death did not exist. They believed that life was to be lived as fully as possible before death.

The question they asked of Jesus was,

"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. Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; then the second and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her."

First, the Sadducees called Jesus Teacher. They must have heard of his teaching in the temple and of the people being spellbound.

Second, there was a lot of story leading up to the actual question. And being Sadducees, they looked to the five books of Moses for their authority. In Deuteronomy 25:5-10, the Levirate Marriage Law is written:

⁵ When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband's brother to her, ⁶ and the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.

They already knew the answer according to the law of Moses. Jesus answers them with Good News; God is alive. God is living. God is always our God for "God is a God of the living." In other words, we should be about things which bring life.

Another question: How is this lived out for those still living?

In order to do this, let's look at our burial liturgy. Leonel L. Mitchell in his book Praying Shapes Believing, say the burial liturgy "finds all its meaning in the resurrection.

The Burial Rite II liturgy (BCPp.491) begins with "I am the Resurrection and I am Life, says the Lord. Whoever has faith in me shall have life, even though he die. And everyone who has life, and has committed himself to me in faith, shall not die for ever."

Then we hear from Job, who in the midst of despair shows us that his faith and hope in God is firm, "As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives and that at the last he will stand upon the earth. After my awaking, he will raise me up; and in my body, I shall see God."

In Job we hear of the resurrection; for "after my skin has been thus destroyed (after Job's death), I shall see God."

We know that our Redeemer lives.

We pray for the spirit of the living God to fall afresh upon us, to open our hearts and minds.

Words to Spirit of the Living God (Iverson)

Spirit of the Living God

Fall fresh on me

Spirit of the Living God

Fall fresh on me

Melt me, mold me

Fill me, use me.

Spirit of the Living God

Fall fresh on me

A reading for the burial liturgy is Revelation 21 which includes, “Death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain.” A reminder of God’s steadfast love for us that these things should not be a part of our eternal life.

And a concluding prayer, “Most merciful God, whose wisdom is beyond our understanding. Deal graciously with us in our grief. Surround us with your love, that we may not be overwhelmed by our loss, but have confidence in your goodness, and strength to meet the days to come, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

This prayer is meant for those of us who are still here in our earthly life; that we will be filled with confidence and strength.

Our faith provides the words which shape our believing. Mitchell also reminds us that the post communion prayer speaks of the Eucharist as a “foretaste of God’s heavenly banquet... a comfort in affliction, and a pledge of our inheritance in that kingdom where there is no death, neither sorrow, nor crying, but the fullness of joy with all [God’s] saints.” (p.226)

What is resurrection like?

We might look to a contemporary song for an answer. “I can only imagine”

*I can only imagine what it will be like
When I walk, by your side
I can only imagine what my eyes will see
When your face is before me
I can only imagine.*

*Surrounded by Your glory
What will my heart feel
Will I dance for you Jesus
Or in awe of You be still
Will I stand in your presence
Or to my knees will I fall
Will I sing hallelujah
Will I be able to speak at all
I can only imagine*

I imagine that we will live in the presence of God and that we will be related to one another in and through our relationship with God. I imagine God will raise us from death to new life as Jesus tells the Sadducees today, we “cannot die, because [we] are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.”

I think this gospel story today is not about who would be married to whom but rather about our doubts and fears about whether our loved ones will be there to greet us.

At least for me and perhaps for others who have lost loved ones, the answer to the question might be, "I want to see the ones I have loved and lost. I want to give them a hug. I want to talk to them about whether they have gotten to read books, or play baseball, or go skiing and tell them about what has been going on for me."

Katherine Doyle, in her commentary of this lesson. thinks Jesus might say,

*"You're missing the point
Live for now.
Live lives of loving me and
loving your neighbor
and let me worry about the rest.*

*Stop spending so much time
trying to figure out what happens,
Who's in and who's out,
And love each other
Unconditionally
as I have loved you."*

God calls us to be here and now.

Trusting God sometimes means living with the unknown and the mystery.

We can only imagine.

Amen.