

Pentecost 22 – Proper 27C – November 9, 2025

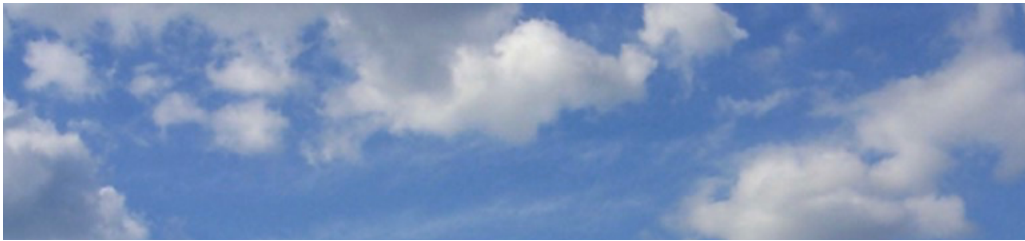
Haggai 1:15b-2:9

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17

Luke 20:27-38

Pondering the Beyond

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Bainbridge Island, WA*



Children ask some of the best questions. They cut through the clutter and get to the essentials. Some of you may know the delightful books *Children's Letters to God* that contain gems of innocent inquiry. Here is a small sampling:

- *Joyce wrote: "Dear God, Thank you for the baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy."*
- *Eugene wrote: "Dear God, I didn't think that orange went with purple until I saw the sunset you made on Tuesday. That was cool!"*
- *Jane asked: "Dear God, Instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don't You just keep the ones you have now?"*
- *A five-year-old looking at the sky said, "If heaven is that pretty from the bottom, imagine how it must look on the top!"*

When we get tangled up with our own deep questions about life and death ... as we seek answers that just don't come easily... we can get some joyful relief by spending time with our young ones who bring their fresh, unincumbered, question-asking selves to the project of exploring the meaning of life and matters of faith.

The question the Sadducees asked Jesus could not be further away from the spirit of child's delightfully inquiring mind. As with other snare-laying accounts we have heard in recent weeks, the intent of the Sadducees' question was to trick Jesus... to make him look stupid in front of others. Jesus does not take the bait.

In ancient Judaism, there wasn't just one flavor of faith, there were various Jewish sects, each having slightly different beliefs and focuses. We have heard about Pharisees, Levites, and Sadducees. Sadducees belonged to the upper echelons of Judean society. They were the religious elite. Sadducees were heavily involved in politics and, as a priestly order, controlled the temple in Jerusalem. Levites also served in the temple but were involved in more menial, caretaking jobs. The sect of Pharisees tended to be comprised of commoners whose greatest concern was adherence to the law of Moses. A significant difference between Pharisees and Sadducees... was that Sadducees did not believe in any form of resurrection from dead. Sadducees did not believe in an immortal soul... and it wasn't unusual for the extremely self-sufficient Sadducees to believe that God is not actually involved in our lives. It therefore should not be surprising that the Sadducees were less than impressed by the itinerant preacher Jesus who came to tell the world that God is

near and that God cares. In an effort to show their superiority, the Sadducees ask Jesus a very hypothetical question hoping to make Jesus look foolish.

The question refers back Torah law regarding marriage.¹ The law says that if a woman's husband dies, she is to marry her late husband's brother or cousin in order to keep the husband's name and bloodline intact. The system also provided for the care of widows who might have little or no other means of support. The scenario the Sadducees present is that of a woman who is not widowed once, not even twice, but seven times. Remembering that the Sadducees do not believe in resurrection, they ask Jesus, when the woman finally dies, "whose wife will the woman be?" How does Jesus respond? Even though the Sadducees do not believe in an afterlife, their hypothetical conjecture... is that heaven would be pretty much business as usual, that the same laws apply in heaven as they do on earth. Jesus has other ideas... in fact... he flips the scenario. His God is bigger than academic questions like... "who will be married to who in the afterlife?" And while we are at it, let us consider this story from the widow's perspective. I think it is safe to say that status of the woman described in the Sadducee's question was that of property... property to be passed on from one brother to another. The question "Whose wife will the woman be?" doesn't begin to consider the woman's experience. I like what Debie Thomas says about the woman who arrives in heaven and...

*"... finally, finally – [she is] in a place where her worth and her belovedness don't depend on her husband, or her fertility, or her sex appeal. Imagine her basking in the safe, unconditional, and eternal love of God who created her."*²

Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage, 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... Now God is not of the dead but of the living; for to God all of them are alive."³

In the trajectory of the gospel story... this encounter takes place in the temple. It occurs as the cross looms in the distance. Jesus has less than a week to live. Far from Jesus being in a mode of winding up his business, his ministry... Jesus' work in the world... is crescendo-ing. Jesus is forever about bridging divides, breaking down walls of division, calling for justice, and reminding the world that God's realm embraces ALL THAT IS... life, death... eternity... all of it. His work will take him to the cross where, after a last breath, the curtain will be torn, the cosmos will shake, and all will go quiet... until a new day dawns and we are given the gift of resurrection life... new life that is calling us to wake up and live fully in the here and now and forever more. The gift of God's immeasurable love will be revealed in ways we cannot begin to fathom.

It is difficult for us mere mortals to contemplate the vastness of God's love. We are a people who tend to be anchored in linear time that is measured with devices we have strapped to our wrists, or that read out hours, minutes and seconds on wall clocks, ovens, and all sorts of electronic devices... you name it. But let us remember that there are two kinds of time. The kind of time we tend to be ruled by in our day-to-day lives is "Chronos" time... time measured by physical chronometers... time measuring devices of all sorts that seem to be ubiquitous. If Chronos time is on a horizontal axis, moving from one second forward towards the next, then Kairos time is on a vertical axis... Kairos time intersects and breaks through our Chronos bubble... and at times we

¹ Deuteronomy 25:5

² Debie Thomas, "Children of the Resurrection," *Journey with Jesus*, November 3, 2019, <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2440-children-of-the-resurrection>

³ Luke 20:28

recognize it and have a glimpse of God's eternal time... In Kairos time, we experience a sense of "time-less-ness." For me, being in Kairos time means being fully present without the nagging demands of linear time... if but for a moment. The ancient Greek concept of Kairos time is that it is a moment of opportunity, a moment of truth, a fleeting moment that has an other-worldly quality. We swim in the waters of Kairos time, yet we are distracted by the demands of linear time. Kairos time is resurrection time in which our God of life and hope makes all things new. Within a Kairos moment dwells possibility and new life. When we recognize God's presence, we are in a moment when Chronos time and Kairos time meet.

Today we contemplate the meaning of God's love known in resurrection life. "Our God is a god not of the dead, but of the living..." says Jesus. Even though we try to imagine what comes after this life... even as we ... with wonder... consider what heaven might look like... we can't really know. We approach the certain reality of our mortality in faith and in hope. Our Holy Scriptures offer us images and words that create but the faintest of sketches of what heaven is like. There is no proof about what lies ahead. There is faith. ... and there are the musings of our young philosophers as they ponder the meaning of heaven:

- One child proclaims that... "Heaven is all around us. You can find it in church or on a boat."
- Isabella, age 6, says that heaven is where "You get your very own puppy and it never grows up and your puppy has its own pet elephant."
- Brennan, age 3 believes that in heaven, "There are lots of bird and we get to play with trains all day long."

I would like to end this contemplation of life and death... resurrection and heaven... with the words of John O'Donohue, from his book, *To Bless the Space Within*. The book was published two months after his sudden death in 2008. O'Donohue continues bless us with his words about our place in eternity:

'May there be some beautiful surprise
 Waiting for you inside death
 Something you never knew or felt,
 Which with one simple touch
 Absolves you of all loneliness and loss,
 As you quicken within the embrace
 For which your soul was eternally made.
 'May your heart be speechless
 At the sight of the truth
 Of all your belief had hoped,
 Your heart breathless
 In the light and lightness
 Where each and every thing
 Is at last its true self
 Within that serene belonging
 That dwells beside us
 On the other side
 Of what we see.'

Amen...