

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost  
Proper 27  
Year C

Job 19:23-27a  
Psalm 17:1-9  
2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17  
Luke 20:27-38

In the Gospel reading today, we are nearing the end of Jesus' ministry. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem has already taken place and Jesus is in the Temple teaching. It is in this setting that the Sadducees approach Jesus with a question. Jesus has already answered the Pharisees' questions in such a way that the evangelist tells us they have no more questions for Jesus. The Sadducees see their opportunity to trap Jesus with a ridiculous story.

Of the three major groups in First Century Judaism, both the Pharisees and the Essenes believed in the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees, on the other hand, did not. They looked only to what was written in the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, as their scriptures, while the other groups looked at the oral Torah – the Pentateuch, the prophets, and the wisdom books, along with the written Pentateuch – for their scriptures. This narrow focus was a point of contention between the groups.

The Sadducees were the elite of society. They were the party of the chief priests, who controlled the Temple worship and finances, as well as the majority of the seats in the Sanhedrin, the Jewish legislative body. They were also in favor of working with the occupying Roman forces who controlled the selection of the High Priest.

The question they posed to Jesus was a convoluted tale of a woman and seven brothers, based on the belief that it was the role of a man to marry his brother's widow if there were no children from the marriage. The original purpose of this law was to provide a man with a lineage to maintain his ancestral property, while providing for the support of the widow. It was also based on the idea that a woman was almost property of her husband. The Sadducees just carried to the extreme. You can almost hear the chuckles from them as they asked the question.

Knowing that the Sadducees only looked to the Pentateuch for their scriptures, Jesus responded from this source. He first explained the differences between this life and the life to come. While we may marry and raise children in this life, in the life to come, we will be more like the angels, living forever, but without marriage. If the purpose of marriage was to provide offspring to ensure a legacy, immortality took care of that. There is no need for the angels to have offspring if they lived forever and the same will be for people in the life to come.

To make His point about the resurrection, Jesus looks to the story of Moses and the burning bush. In that story, Moses hears that God is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God does not say that, way back when, but in the present tense. Thus, the great patriarchs are still living in God's eyes. If the patriarchs are still living, resurrected, then we shall all experience the resurrection.

This is our hope today. We believe there is more to our existence than what we see now. The African-American slaves held firmly to the belief in the resurrection as a survival technique. It gave them hope of a better day ahead. People around us today have this same hope. No matter the trials we face in this world, there is a better life to come.

Are we to just sit back and wait for this new life to come? That is the question Paul addresses in his second letter to the people of Thessalonica. Some were so excited to be looking to the life to come that they quit working and just sat around waiting. Paul warns us that we are not to take this posture, but to keep doing the work of ministry until that day arrives. Furthermore, it could be a long wait. Now, some 2000 years later, we are still waiting, but not without hope. We continue doing the work God has laid before us while we look expectantly for the life to come. Then, we shall enjoy all of the promises of God.