

Sermon Text – Sunday, November 9, 2025 – Pastor Paula Kraus

1st Reading: Haggai 1:15b-2:9; 2nd Reading: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5,13-17
Scripture for message: Luke 20:27-38 “Eternal Presence”

This scripture from Luke’s gospel gives us so much to think about, we could talk about the ancient concept that women were only property inherited by consecutive brothers and only useful for procreation. Just so you know, by the time of Jesus in the first century of our common era, this ancient rule of marriage was not in practice. We can discuss how painful this woman’s life must have been with each “marriage” ending in the death of a spouse, not to mention shame for being childless. I am sure Jesus had some compassion for her in hearing this story. Although all this is true, Luke’s Gospel reading, and the other readings this morning, set the stage for a discussion of resurrection.

Jesus, as he teaches his followers, gives plenty of “end times” hints but this time he speaks to the Sadducees in terms that affirm the resurrection as a promised reality “in that age.” Jesus does promise that we don’t know when and we don’t know how but that those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection . . . cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God. In addition, Paul who writes to the churches in Thessalonica because they believe that day had already come and in secret, reminds them and us that “that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed.”

So, in our reading from Luke’s gospel, the Sadducees, who claim there is no resurrection, are challenging Jesus with this scenario. By the way, the Sadducees believed that only the first five books of scripture, Moses’ writings, the Torah, were legitimate scriptures. Because the Torah does not mention resurrection, or angels, or Spirit – they were not legitimate beliefs of the Jewish faith, according to the Sadducees. For the Sadducees, if a life were to continue after death, it would have to be in the memories of the people who knew the person who had died. According to Theologian Eberhard Busch, for the Sadducees “life is to be lived as fully as possible within the boundaries of earthly time.”¹ Contrary to this, Jesus teaches us the lessons of storing up riches not in the world but for the next – there is more to come.

¹ John Senior. “Theological Perspective on Luke 20:27-40” *Feasting on the Gospels: Luke Vol 2*. eds. Jarvis & Johnson. WJK. 2014. Print. 206-210.

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Jesus responds to them with a message that “what has been will no longer be.” He draws the comparison to marriage not only because of the Sadducees question but also because he wants his followers to understand that there is a chasm of separation between life and death. The resurrection will be unlike anything we can experience this side of eternity. There will be no need for marriage as the Sadducees explain it because there will be no more death and therefore no need for procreation. For the Sadducees, and others in Jesus’ time, marriage had only one purpose and that was to create offspring to carry on the family name and heritage. Fortunately, our current perception of marriage has evolved and maybe that will change things in eternity as well.

Jesus mentions angels, maybe because he is challenging the Sadducees belief that there are no angels in addition to no resurrection. Jesus claims the children of the resurrection will be like angels – not angels but like angels. I am not going to claim that I know what angels are like and what this means for our eternity – I don’t think we will be sitting on clouds with wings playing golden harps unless of course that is our eternal desire. However, like angels – maybe we will be close to God because angels are close to God, maybe we will have different bodies because angels have different bodies, and of course angels live forever and that is what eternity is about for us.

I believe Jesus is telling his followers that there is profoundly more to life than just the human experience of it – God’s provision of an abundant life transcends the human experience. Jesus affirms that our identity is reconstituted in the resurrection – Moses himself showed the fact that the dead are raised. . . where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham the God not of the dead, but of the living – Abraham is still Abraham – for to God all of them are alive. This should be reassuring to us that our identity and our self-awareness reappear in the next life. Therefore, as Paul writes, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught. And we read from the prophet Haggai that “the latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former” which is a reminder that better things will come.

In these words of scripture, we are reminded of God’s presence. “I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear” These words even though they came from an ancient prophet ring true today – God’s presence is eternal. The Lord is near to all who call on him, the Lord watches over all who love him (Psalm 145). To further illustrate this point, words from Job proclaim

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God's eternal presence even unto our death, "For I know my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God."

Sadly, in our modern times there are people, who like the Sadducees of Jesus' time, doubt there will be an actual bodily resurrection. They therefore build memorials to preserve their memories – believing that these are the only ways eternity will exist for them. Maybe if someone has not accepted Jesus and Jesus' promise of eternity through the salvation offered at the cross that might be true. However, for believers, Christians like us, the promise of an after-life with Jesus as children of the resurrection is very true even if we cannot wrap our heads around it. I am not saying memorials are a waste – in this life and for those of us left to continue, our memories and memorial celebrations are precious and meaningful.

We must however let go of the "boxes" we put people in because those containers will not exist in the afterlife. Jesus responds to the Sadducees question with the statement, "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" implying that marriage is of this world not the next. Paul writes in one of his letters that there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female for all are one in Christ again implying that life in God's kingdom is different from our earthly experience. We should let go of any notion that the afterlife will be like life in the earthly realm.

What has been will no longer be. We don't know, no one can know with any degree of certainty what tomorrow will bring, and we don't know how eternity will appear. Those who try to predict through "mystical" writings or cryptic quotations could be the false prophets who lead us astray and who we are warned to not believe. We cannot project visions of worldly things on the afterlife. Just as God is bigger than our human minds can grasp, there are not words in human language that could adequately describe a life that transcends the human experience.

We live in the already and the not yet – in the realities of our earthly existence now and the promise that God will bring the world to the fulfillment God intends for it. We know God promises God's eternal presence and that presence is now and not yet. All our scriptures remind us of God's promise of prosperity, of God's steadfast and enduring love, and of God's redemptive power over our lives. We do not know what God's plan for creation is only that God

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has a plan that has been in place since that couple exercised free will in God's garden. Sometimes, for some of us, the realities of existence in the earthly realm causes anxiety and we call out to God – “what the heck is happening?” – the response is as Paul writes “Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you?”

For the church – live in hope that although God will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and God will shake all the nations - “My Spirit abides among you; do not fear.” We, the people of the church and the children of the resurrection, only know two things with any degree of certainty. The resurrection is promised, and we have no idea how or when. Stories like the “Left Behind” series are just that stories – maybe we will not be raised up while our clothes are neatly folded in the places we used to be, we will be raised up however in whatever way God has planned for us. Bottom line – the resurrection occurs because God gives life abundantly. God makes possible life that death cannot erase.

If you are looking forward to that better place where you reunite with the people you love and wish to spend eternity with – I'm guessing that will be exactly how you spend your eternity because it is what will bring you joy. Personally, I believe that eternity will be spent in God's presence and all the earthly desires will be left behind – but who knows? We could find ourselves sitting in purest white robes strumming on golden harps, we could be living in our happy family units without the strife of an earthly existence, maybe we will be living in mansions where the streets are paved with gold, or as Marge Orlovski used to dream about we could be butterflies floating around in heavenly existence. Theologically speaking God is always present and eternity will most certainly not be what we expect. I guess we just need to realize that we cannot project visions of worldly things on the afterlife – the only thing we are assured of is that what has been will no longer be – see the former things have passed away – God is doing a new thing. But – God is doing this new thing with and for us, eternally present.