

## At least the Pharisees were Fair...

[Text - Luke 20:27-38]

Pastor Dave Shackle  
November 10, 2013

In today's New Testament reading, a group of Sadducees come to Jesus with an extremely complex question, in an attempt to refute his belief in the Resurrection. The Sadducees were dogmatic, hard-headed religious leaders [not at all like us docile, soft-hearted UCC types.] The Sadducees based their teachings exclusively on the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, known as the Pentateuch. And even though the Pharisees and other religious leaders in Israel gave credence to additional writings, like the Psalms and the Prophets, the Sadducees insisted that only the five so-called "Books of Moses" were to be trusted. That's one reason that the Sadducees have so much trouble with Jesus: not only does he refer to the Psalms and Prophets in his teachings, he even expresses insights about God that go beyond those established sacred writings.

It seems that Jesus believes that God is *still speaking*, in ways that can transcend those ancient, holy texts. This allows Jesus himself to speak, and to act, with a remarkable authority; which greatly upsets the religious authorities of his day. He even talks with great conviction about Everlasting Life, something in which the Sadducees don't believe, which is why they are so sad, you see....

Anyway, the Sadducees decide to show Jesus just how preposterous his belief in the Resurrection is, by asking him a really strange question. Kind of like the contrived plot of the 1950's musical *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, the Sadducees formulate a convoluted story about *Seven Brothers for One Bride*. They create this ridiculously improbable scenario to show Jesus just how weird our relationships would be, if there were an after-life. Of course, Jesus doesn't get pulled into this absurd entanglement about multiple marriages and deaths. Instead, he says that one simply cannot compare life in this world, with life *beyond* this world.

Jesus wants the Sadducees to realize that in the Realm of the Divine, things are much more grand and glorious than our mortal minds can comprehend. And he does this by appealing to *their* minds, saying, 'Even Moses [*your* authority, Moses] realized that the Realm of God far surpasses that which the natural eye can see, or our minds can fully grasp.' He then reminds them of that pivotal moment in Moses' life, when he experiences the Holy One in the phenomenon of the burning bush. His point being, that God *can* surprise us in many different ways, just as God surprised Moses in that strange and mysterious fashion. And Jesus contends that the Holy One who says to Moses, "I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," wouldn't self-identify with the *dead*, but rather with the *living*. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all died some 400 years before Moses, yet God is still their God, as they continue to exist in the Divine Consciousness. So, just because our natural senses can't perceive something, or our minds can't fully grasp it, doesn't mean that it's not part of a deeper reality.

In reality, it's actually quite illogical to try to reduce all of Life's mysteries, or the Majestic Sacred Mystery, into a tidy little package that we can fully understand. Yet

that's what the Sadducees were tempted to do; and it remains a temptation for people today. In fact, this past week, I found myself trying to figure-out and explain this particularly tricky text - so that I could clearly address all the questions it raises, and everyone could go home happy and impressed with my brilliant answers! [I'll spare you the suspense: I couldn't do it; and I'm certainly not surprised!]

*Any* god that can be explained, defined and summarized by mere words, is far too small to truly be *God*. Yet there seems to be something within our human nature that wants to be able to completely comprehend and explain the Divine Nature - to keep God neatly contained in a box, or defined by a book. However, whether it be the five "Books of Moses" or the sixty-six books of our own Bible, no amount of writing can begin to contain the entire essence of the Life-Giving Source behind this mysterious and majestic universe. Even Jesus doesn't spend a lot of time trying to explain the nature of God, or the detail of the Resurrection. Instead, he concentrates on the more important and practical point: that "God...is the God of the *living!*" Jesus' mission, therefore, is to touch and transform the lives of people in *this* world, and help them to not needlessly worry about the world to come. Jesus proclaims that in our living, *and* in our dying, we are all securely held in the loving care of our Gracious and Compassionate Creator. And through his own living and dying, Jesus encourages us to trust that there is nothing that can ever separate us from the Love of God.

Jesus doesn't try to give us all the details, or all the answers, about life or death. Instead, he encourages us to fully *live* our lives, trusting that our Heavenly Parent watches over us, and will one day bring us safely home. For Jesus, this is much more than an intellectual philosophy, it's an actual way of life. Therefore, throughout his life, he is willing to take tremendous risks, because he knows that he is ultimately safe and secure in the care of his Heavenly Parent. And as a genuine child of God, Jesus realizes his connection to all his sisters and brothers; and he is willing to do all within his power to raise them up, and to welcome them into this Divine Realm of meaningful and abundant life.

I believe that's where today's text can inspire you and me - even with its bizarre speculation about the afterlife - because it reminds us to stay focused on the fulness of life which is right in front of us. Jesus *did* talk about life beyond this world, yet he fully lived his life in *this* world, and in the present moment. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, advocated for the lowly and oppressed. He boldly challenged those who thought that they had the inside track to God, reminding them that God is far greater and grander than their limited minds might ever envision. And because he had this wonderful, personal connection with his Heavenly Parent, Jesus was able to envision an interconnected community of faith - where God's Loving Will might be done "on earth as it is in heaven."

In this Divine Realm, genuine *faith* involves trusting in things that are truly visionary; while working to make that vision a reality. Genuine faith means that you and I trust that our entire lives, and all of Life, are ultimately in the capable care of our Eternal, Originating Source. Even when things look horribly bleak, and it appears that the power

of evil has won the day, Genuine Faith assures us that the Divine Source of Light and Life will prevail!

At the center of our Faith, at the center of our church, stands a cross. It *once* was the cruel symbol of how the corrupt empires and oppressive powers of this world can inflict pain and suffering and death upon the weak and vulnerable; yet it now rises before us as the sure and certain sign of Hope and Joy and Life's Ultimate Victory! "For God is the God of the living!" Today, the Cross of Christ continues to call you and me to look beyond our self-imposed limits, and to grasp the unlimited Love and Grace of God - to take hold of the promise of Abundant Life - in this world, *and* in the world to come! An abundance that allows us to open our minds and our hearts, to welcome those who may be different from us; An abundance that inspires and liberates us to graciously share with others the countless blessing we ourselves have received; An abundance of Life and Light, Energy and Joy so full and meaningful that it truly transcends our human concepts of time and space.

When we think about all of the remarkable advances in technology; when we consider how we are just beginning to understand the amazing, minute complexities of our own DNA, or the awesome vastness of this expanding Cosmos - we also might want to ponder the Originating Source of all this intricate "stuff". While some contend that it all arises from a random explosion of energy and matter, to me that seems a bit simplistic. As the majestic mysteries of Life and Essence continue to evolve and unfold, I find it quite reasonable to contend that there is a Divine Persona or Purpose behind it all. To claim to comprehend Who or What that is, is also a bit simplistic. However, to trust in that Ultimate, Divine wisdom and goodness - and to live our lives accordingly - seems completely reasonable and right.