

November 10, 2013

**The Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost**

Luke 20.27-38

All Saints' Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Georgia

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This morning's Gospel opens with a joke. I imagine the Sadducees snickering with each other, shoving and daring like pre-teen boys: "You tell him..."

"Naw, you say it,

"Chicken!"

"I dare you..."

"Fine... SO, Jesus, if this resurrection thing is true, and a woman's husband dies and she follows the law and marries all seven of his brothers..."

It is Stump the Chump for Jesus.

Jesus, as far as I can tell, wasn't much of a joker. Whether he actually took the question seriously, we'll never know. But rather than go on the offense, rather than get angry and vengeful or dismiss the question as cheeky and rude, Jesus turned it into yet another opportunity to teach about God's love and mercy.

You've got the wrong question, he tells them.

It is the wrong question because our relationships in life eternal are not the same as the relationships we cultivate here on earth. It is the wrong question, Jesus tell them, seriously and without joking, because all are worthy in the next life.

It is the wrong question because you have put the law above love. And now and hereafter, love wins. So if your question starts with law, it is always going to be the wrong question in the kingdom of God.

The ways of earth are not the ways of heaven. The ways of humanity are not the ways of God.

It is a reasonable question, actually. What do our relationships look like after death? How will we be with each other in the great hereafter?

It is a question asked, either aloud or deep inside, by everyone married after the death of a spouse. And I think, of anyone who has ever loved then lost. How do we remain loyal to past relationships while still continuing to live, all the way until we die?

And again, we hear Jesus: reasonable question, beloved. But the wrong question.

This is, in my estimation, one of those places where the human mind and imagination reach their limits. Here, in this life, we estimate love as finite, as something shared, for sure, but only to a degree. Love has rules, here, in the way act.

But love has no rules in the kingdom of God. Love has no rules in the kingdom of heaven. In true Lukan fashion, this is a radical statement about the nature and being of God.

Jesus patiently answers this rule-based, law-bound question, finite from the Sadducees with infinity. With limitlessness.

This is good news that we can hear even today, with our similar Sadduceean questions and limited attitudes. As God is limitless, so is God's love limitless.

This is good news for the downtrodden, the poor, the lost, the sick, the vulnerable. This is good news for those who see love as rule bound, law-burdened, limited by our imaginations. It is good news for those of us who hear voices from within or without, that tell us that there is not enough love for us, that we are somehow outside of the bounds of lovability.

It is wonderful, holy news for those of us whose lives are full of good intentioned, reasonable wrong questions.

It is time for us to hear Jesus' response, not just listen, but HEAR the response that is calling us beyond the questions that bind us to rules that divide and pull apart, rules that put love into little boxes, rules that tell us who and when and how and why.

This weekend, clergy and delegates from our parish came together with clergy and delegates from across our diocese, from Macon to Habersham county, to engage in the councils of the church. The theme of this year's annual council was "drawing the circle wider." We were called to get ourselves more engaged in drawing wider the circles of our parishes and, by extension, the circle of our communion.

On top of that, our assisting bishop, Keith Whitmore, reminded us that, while we need to be constantly engaged in widening our own circles of worship and community, it is God who drew the circle to begin with, and all the created order stands within it. No one is outside of God's circle.

It is time for us to hear the Jesus' response that we are all, living and dead, like angels, children of God, children of the resurrection. And as *those* children of *that* God, we need to both know and *live like we know* that our love has no bounds, that our love has no rules, that the circle of our love must be wide and wider.

We will ask the wrong questions, we will make mistakes, we will look at things through limited human eyes with limited imagination. But we will continue to be reminded, through our Gospel, through our Christ, through our experience of God in each other, that love has no human bounds, that love always draws the circle wider than we can ask or imagine.