

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

THIS OR THAT?

Luke 20:27-38

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Analysis by Chris Repp

27Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him 28and asked him a question, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. 29Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; 30then the second 31and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. 32Finally the woman also died. 33In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her." 34Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; 35but 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. 36Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. 37And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. 38Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."

DIAGNOSIS: This Age

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Dead*

When you're dead, you're dead. So say the Sadducees. ("They didn't believe in the resurrection, and that's why they were sad, you see" – *Old Sunday-School humor*.) We say the same thing. You hear it all the time. "You only go around once." "Live your life to the fullest, because you never know when it might be your last day." To be sure, we declare our belief in the "resurrection of the body" every week in church, but our daily lives, our daily actions and attitudes, suggest we really believe otherwise.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Childless*

For those who are dying with no hope for our own future, we turn our attention to leaving a legacy. We want our lives to make a difference, to mean something. We want at least to be remembered. "We will never forget you," we solemnly promise too-soon deceased friends in eulogies and still-active Facebook pages, never pausing to ponder how long, realistically, our own memories will last. We erect monuments, name buildings, and endow chairs. Those of us who have children take some comfort that at least our family story will be continued, while those who are denied even that comfort through infertility or the loss of a child are understandably devastated.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Unworthy*

But living vicariously through our children or the memory of others is really an attempt to make them an extension of ourselves. All our relationships become perverted by our inward preoccupation. Wives and husbands become possessions, means for our own ends. And such exploitation ultimately also has implications for our relationship with God: Our utilitarian social arrangements with their selfish hidden agendas make us unworthy of the Kingdom of God, and our scorn of the

resurrection threatens to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

PROGNOSIS: That Age

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Worthy*

There will apparently be some, at least, who are considered worthy of God's kingdom in "that age." But their worth will not be on account of their deeds, or on account of their legacies or those who remember them after they are gone. They will be considered worthy because of the worth of the one who gives his life for them. Only because of Jesus' death and resurrection do the unworthy become worthy.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Children*

Baptized into his death and resurrection and trusting, by the grace of God, in our new-found worthiness, we find that the important relationships in our lives are not the ones that further our personal agendas. Our baptism has made us children of God, and it is in that relationship that we find our primary identity. We are thus freed from the need to possess one another, to use others toward our own ends. We become instead a living legacy of our Lord, his living body in and for the world

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Living*

Resurrection ceases to be a matter for idle debating. It becomes instead a living reality in our lives, even on this side of the grave, where even now we are like angels, messengers of God's good news, the life-giving message. And we take that message into all the places where the world finds only death, because all those for whom Christ died are alive to God. And because they are alive to God, they are alive also to us, worthy also of our love and compassion. That's the kind of life that really matters, the kind of life that cannot die.